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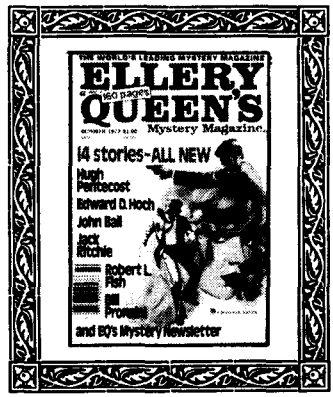

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a *NEW* short story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Charlie Dark, the man without nerves, was "overage, overweight, overeager to stay in the game by the old rules rather than the new." The game? Espionage and counterespionage—front-page stuff. But Charlie considered himself "the last of the generation that puts ingenuity ahead of computer printouts" . . . The deadly duel of two professionals in the game—Charlie Dark versus Gregorius . . .

CHARLIE'S SHELL GAME

by *BRIAN GARFIELD*

By the end of the afternoon I had seen three of them check in at the reception desk and I knew one of them had come to kill me but I didn't know which one.

Small crowds had arrived in the course of the afternoon and I'd had plenty of time to study them while they stood in queues to check in at the reception desk. One lot of 16 had come in together from an airport bus—middle-aged couples, three children, a few solitary businessmen; tourists, most of them, and sitting in the lobby with a magazine for a prop I wrote them off. My man would be young—late twenties, I knew that much.

I knew his name too but he wouldn't be traveling under it.

Actually the dossier was quite thick; we knew a good deal about him, including the probability that he would come to Caracas to kill me. We knew something of his habits and patterns; we'd seen the corpses that marked his backtrail; we knew his name, age, nationality; we had several physical descriptions—they varied but there was agreement on certain points: medium height, muscularly slim, youthful. We knew he spoke at least four languages. But he hadn't been photographed and we had no fingerprints; he was too clever for that.

© *1977 by Brian Garfield.*

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Of the check-ins I'd spied at the Tamanaco desk, three were possibles—any one of them could be my intended assassin.

My job was to take him before he could take me.

Rice had summoned me back from Helsinki and I had arrived in Langley at midnight grumpy and rumpled after the long flight but the cipher had indicated red priority so I'd delivered myself directly to the office without pause to bathe or sleep, let alone eat. I was famished. Rice had taken a look at my stubble and plunged right in, "You're flying to Caracas in the morning. The eight-o'clock plane."

"You may have to carry me on board."

"Me and how many weightlifters?" He glanced at the clock above the official photograph of the President. "You've got eight hours. The briefings won't take that long. Anyhow you can sleep on the plane."

"Maybe. I never have," I said, "but then I've never been this exhausted. Have you got anything to eat around here?"

"No. This should perk you up, though—it's Gregorius."

"Is it now."

"I knew you'd wag your tail."

"All right, you have my attention." Then I had to fight the urge to look straight up over my head in alarm: Rice's smile always provokes the premonition that a Mosler safe is falling toward one's head.

"You've gained it back. Gone off the diet?" Now that he had me hooked in his claws he was happy to postpone the final pounce—like a cat with a chipmunk. I really hate him.

I said, "Crawfish."

"What?"

"It's what you eat in Finland. You take them fresh out of a lake, just scoop them up off the bottom in a wooden box with a chickenwire bottom. You throw them straight into the pot and watch them turn color. I can eat a hundred at a sitting. Now what's this about Caracas and Gregorius?"

"You're getting disgustingly fat, Charlie."

"I've always been fat. As for disgusting, I could diet it off, given the inclination. You, on the other hand, would need to undergo brain surgery. I'd prescribe a prefrontal lobotomy."

"Then you'd have no one left to spice your life."

"Spice? I thought it was hemlock."

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"In this case more likely a few ounces of plastique. That seems to be Gregorius' preference. And you do make a splendid target, Charlie. I can picture two hundred and umpty pounds of blubber in flabby pieces along the ceiling. Gregorius would be most gratified."

He'd mentioned Gregorius now; it meant he was ready to get down to it and I slumped, relieved; I no longer enjoy volleying insults with him—they cut too close and it's been a long while since either of us believed they were jokes. Our mutual hatred is not frivolous. But we need each other. I'm the only one he can trust to do these jobs without a screw-up and he's the only one who'll give me the jobs. The slick militaristic kids who run the organization don't offer their plums to fat old men. In any section but Rice's I'd have been fired years ago—overage, overweight, overeager to stay in the game by the old rules rather than the new. I'm the last of the generation that puts ingenuity ahead of computer print-outs.

They meet once a month on the fifth floor to discuss key personnel reassignments and it's a rare month that goes by without an attempt being made by one of the computer kids to tie a can to my tail; I know for a fact Rice has saved me by threatening to resign: "If he goes, I go." The ultimatum has worked up to now but as we both get older and I get fatter the kids become more strident and I'm dubious how long Rice can continue the holding action. It's not loyalty to me, God knows; it's purely his own self-interest—he knows if he loses me he'll get the sack himself: he hasn't got anybody else in the section who knows how to produce. Nobody worthwhile will work for him. I wouldn't either but I've got no choice. I'm old, fat, stubborn, arrogant, and conceited. I'm also the best.

He said, "Venezuela is an OPEC country of course," and waited to see if I would attend his wisdom—as if the fact were some sort of esoterica. I waited, yawned, looked at my watch. Rice can drive you to idiocy belaboring the obvious. Finally he went on, "The oil-country finance ministers are meeting in Caracas this time. Starting Thursday."

"I haven't been on Mars, you know. They have newspapers even in Helsinki."

"Redundancies are preferable to ignorance, Charlie." It is his litany. I doubt he passes an hour, even in his sleep, when that sentence doesn't run through his mind: he's got it on tape up there.

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"Will you come to the point?"

"They'll be discussing the next round of oil-price hikes," he said. "There's some disagreement among them. The Saudis and the Venezuelans want to keep the increase down below five percent. Some of the others want a big boost—perhaps twenty-five or thirty percent."

"I plead. Tell me about Gregorius."

"This is getting us there. Trust me."

"Let's see if I can't speed it up," I said. "Of course it's the Mahdis—"

"Of course."

"They want Israel for themselves, they don't want a Palestinian peace agreement, they want to warn the Arab countries that they won't be ignored. What is it, then? They've arranged to have Gregorius explode a roomful of Arab leaders in Caracas? Sure. After that the Arab countries won't be so quick to negotiate a Middle East settlement without Mahdi participation. Am I warm?"

"Scalding. Now I know you're awake."

"Barely."

The Mahdi gang began as an extremist splinter arm of the Black Septemberists. The gang is small but serious. It operates out of floating headquarters in the Libyan desert. There's a long and tedious record of hijackings, terror bombings, assassinations. Nothing unique about that. What makes the gang unusual is its habit of using mercenaries. The Mahdis—they named themselves after the mystic who wiped out Gordon at Khartoum—are Palestinian but they're Bedouins, not Arabs; they're few in number and they're advanced in age compared with the teenage terrorists of the PLO. The Mahdi staff cadre consists of men who were adults at the time of the 1947 expulsion from Palestine. Some of the sheiks are in their seventies by now.

Rather than recruit impassioned young fools the gang prefers to hire seasoned professional mercenaries; they get better results that way and they don't need to be concerned about generation-gap factionalism. They are financed by cold-blooded groups of various persuasions and motivations, many of them in Iraq.

They had used Gregorius at least twice in the past, to my knowledge: the Hamburg Bahnhof murders and the assassination of an Israeli agent in Cairo. The Hamburg bomb had demolished not only a crowd of Israeli trade officials but also the main staircase of the railroad station. The Cairo setup had been simpler,

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just one victim, blown up when he stepped onto the third stair of his entrance porch.

Gregorius was a killer for hire and he was well paid; apparently his fees were second only to those of Carlos the Jackal, who had coordinated the Munich athlete murders and the Entebbe hijack; but Gregorius always chose his employment on ideological grounds—he had worked for the PLO, the Baader-Meinhof Group, the Rhodesian rebels, the Cuban secret service, but he'd never taken a job for the West. Evidently he enjoyed fighting his own private war of liberation. Of course he was psychotic but there was no point dwelling on his lunacy because it might encourage one to underestimate him; he was brilliant.

Rice said, "We've got it on authority—fairly good authority—that the Mahdis have hired Gregorius for two targets in Caracas. Ministers. The Saudi and the Venezuelan. And of course whatever bonus prizes he may collect—bombs usually aren't too selective."

"How good is 'fairly good?"

"Good enough to justify my pulling you off the Helsinki station and posting you to Venezuela."

"All right." If he didn't want to reveal the source he didn't have to; it wasn't really my affair. Need-to-know and all that.

Rice got down to nuts and bolts and that pleased me because he always hurries right through them: they bore him. He has a grand image of himself as the sort of master strategist who leaves tactical detail to junior staff. Unhappily our section's budget doesn't permit any chain of command and Rice has to do his own staff work and that's why we usually have to go into the field with a dearth of hard information; that's one reason why nobody else will work for him—Rice never does much homework.

"It could happen anywhere," he concluded. "The airport, a hotel lobby, a state banquet, any of the official ministerial meetings, a limousine. Anywhere."

"Have you alerted Venezuelan security?"

"I didn't have to. I've established your liaison out of courtesy."

In other words the tip had come from Venezuelan security. And they didn't feel confident of their own ability to contain Gregorius. Very astute of them; most small-nation security chiefs lack the humility to admit it when a job is too big for them.

Rice continued, in the manner of an afterthought, "Since we don't know where he plans to make the strike we've taken it upon ourselves to—"

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"Is that a royal 'we'?"

"No. The fifth floor. As I was saying, it's been decided that our best chance at him is to lure him into the open before the ministers begin the conference. Of course he doesn't tempt easily."

Then he smiled. My flesh crawled.

"You're the bait, Charlie. He'll come out for you."

"In other words it's an open secret that I'll be in Caracas and you've spread the word where you know he'll hear it." I brooded at him, hating him afresh. "Maybe you've neglected something."

"Oh?"

"Gregorius is like me in one respect. He's—"

"Young, fast, up-to-date, and sexy. Yes indeed, Charlie, you could be twins."

I cut across his chuckle. "He's a professional and so am I. Business comes first. He'd love to nail me. All right. But first he'll do the job he's being paid for."

"Not this time. We've leaked the news that you're being sent down there to terminate him regardless of cost. He thinks you're being set up to nail him *after* he exposes himself by blowing up a few oil ministers. He can't risk that—you got closer to nailing him than anybody else ever has. He knows if you're set on him again you won't turn loose until you've done the job. And he knows if he sets off a bomb while you're in earshot of it you'll reach him. He needs more lead-time than that if he means to get away."

And he smiled again. "He's got to put you out of the way before he goes after the ministers. Once the bombs go off he can't hang around afterward to take you on. He's got to do it first."

I said, "I've heard stronger reasoning. He's confident of his skills. Supopose he just ignores me and goes ahead with the job as if I weren't there?"

"He hates you too much. He couldn't walk away, could he? Not after Beirut. Why, I believe he hates you even more than I do."

Two years earlier we'd known Gregorius was in Beirut to blast the Lebanese-coalition prime minister. I'd devised one of the cleverer stunts of my long career. In those days Gregorius worked in tandem with his brother, who was six years older and nearly as bright as Gregorius. Our plan was good and Gregorius walked into it but I'd had to make use of Syrian back-up personnel on the alternate entrances to that verminous maze of alleys and one of the Syrians had been too nervous or too eager for glory. He'd

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started the shooting too early by about seven-tenths of a second and that was all the time Gregorius needed to get away.

Gregorius left his brother behind in ribbons in the alley; still alive today but a vegetable. Naturally Gregorius made efforts afterward to find out who was responsible for the ambush. Within a few weeks he knew my name. And of course Gregorius—that's his code name, not the one he was born with—was Corsican by birth and personal revenge is a religion with those people. I knew one day he'd have to come for me; I'd lost very little sleep over it—people have been trying to kill me for 35 years.

Just before Rice sent me to the airport he said, "We want him alive, Charlie."

"You're joking."

"Absolutely not. It's imperative. The information in his head can keep the software boys busy for eight months. Alive—it's an order from the fifth floor."

"You've already blindfolded me and sent me into the cage with him and now you want to handcuff me too?"

"Why, Charlie, that's the way you like it best, you old masochist."

He knows me too well.

I'd watched them check in at the hotel desk and I'd narrowed the possibilities to three. I'd seen which pigeonholes the room clerk had taken the keys from so I knew which rooms they were in. I didn't need to look at the register because it wouldn't help me to know what names or passports they were using.

It was like the Mexican Shell Game: three shells, one pea. Under which shell is the pea?

He had to strike at me today because Rice's computer said so. And it probably had to be the Tamanaco Hotel because I had studied everything in the Gregorius dossier and I knew he had a preference—so strong it was almost a compulsion—for the biggest and best old hotel in a city. Big because it was easy to be anonymous there; best because Gregorius had been born dirt-poor in Corsica and was rich now; old because he had good taste but also because old walls tend to be soundproof. In Caracas the Tamanaco was it.

I was making it easy for him, sitting in plain sight in the lobby.

Earlier in the day I'd toured the city with Cartlidge. He looks like his name—all gaunt sinews and knobby joints. We'd traced

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the route in from the airport through the long mountain tunnel and we'd had a look at the hotel where the Saudi minister was booked in; on my advice the Venezuelans made a last-minute switch and when the Saudi arrived tomorrow morning he'd be informed of the move to another hotel. We had a look at the palace where the conference would take place and I inquired about the choice of halls: to forestall Gregorius, the Venezuelans had not announced any selection—there were four suitable conference rooms in the building—and indeed the final choice wouldn't actually be made until about ten minutes before the session began. They were doing a good job. I made a few minor suggestions and left them to it.

After lunch we'd set up a few things and then I'd staked myself in the Tamanaco lobby and four hours later I was still there.

Between five and six I saw each of the three again.

The first one spent the entire hour at the pool outside the glass doors at the rear of the lobby. He was a good swimmer with the build and grace of a field-and-track contender; he had a round Mediterranean face, more Italian than French in appearance. He had fair hair cut very short—crew cut—but the color and cut didn't mean anything; you could buy the former in bottles. For the convenience of my own classification I dubbed him The Blond.

The second one appeared shortly after five, crossing the lobby in a flared slim white tropical suit. The heels of his beige shoes clicked on the tiles like dice. He stopped at the side counter to make a phone call—he could have been telephoning or he could have been using it as an excuse to study my abundant profile—and then he went along to the bell captain's desk and I heard him ask the captain to summon him a taxi, as there weren't any at the curb in front. His voice was deep: he spoke Spanish with a slight accent that could have been French. He had a very full head of brown hair teased into an Afro and he had a strong actorish face like those of Italians who play Roman gigolos in Technicolor films. He went right outside again, presumably to wait for his taxi. I dubbed him The Afro. If he'd actually looked at me I hadn't detected it—he had the air of a man who only looked at pretty girls or mirrors.

The third one was a bit more thickly muscled and his baldness was striking. He had a squarish face and a high pink dome above it. Brynner and Savalas shave their heads; why not Gregorius?

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This one walked with an athlete's bounce—he came down about half-past five in khaki Bermudas and a casual Hawaiian tourist shirt; he went into the bar and when I glanced in on my way past to the gents' he was drinking something tall and chatting to a buxom dark-haired woman whose bored pout was beginning to give way to loose fourth-drink smiles. From that angle and in that light the bald man looked very American but I didn't cross him off the list; I'd need more to go on.

I was characterizing each of them by hairstyle but it was useless for anything but shorthand identification. Gregorius, when last seen by witnesses, had been wearing his hair long and black, shoulder-length hippie style. None of these three had hair remotely like that but the sightings had been five weeks ago and he might have changed it ten times in the interval.

The Blond was on a poolside chaise toweling himself dry when I returned from the loo to the lobby. I saw him shake his head back with that gesture used more often by women than by men to get the hair back out of their eyes. He was watching a girl dive off the board; he was smiling.

I had both room keys in my pocket and didn't need to stop at the desk. It was time for the first countermove. I went up in the elevator and walked past the door of my own room and entered the connecting room with the key Cartlidge had obtained for me. It was a bit elaborate but Gregorius had been known to hook a detonator to a doorknob and it would have been easy enough for him to stop a chambermaid in the hall: "My friend, the very fat American, I've forgotten the number of his room."

So I entered my room through the connecting door rather than from the hall. I didn't really expect to find anything amiss but I didn't want to risk giving Rice the satisfaction of hearing how they'd scraped sections of blubber off the ceiling.

Admittedly I am fat but nevertheless you could have knocked me over with a feather at that moment. Because the bomb was wired to the doorknob.

I looked at it from across the room. I didn't go any closer; I returned to the adjoining room, got the *Do Not Disturb* placard, went out into the hall, and hung the placard on the booby-trapped doorknob. One of the many differences between a professional like Gregorius and a professional like Charlie Dark is that Charlie Dark tends to worry about the possibility that an innocent hotel maid might open the door.

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Then I made the call from the phone in the adjoining room. Within two minutes Cartlidge was there with his four-man bomb squad. They'd been posted in the basement beside the hotel's wine cellar.

The crew went to work in flak vests and armored masks. Next door I sat with Cartlidge and he looked gloomy. "When it doesn't explode he'll know we defused it." But then he always looks gloomy.

I said, "He didn't expect this one to get me. It's a signal flag, that's all. He wants me to sweat first."

"And are you? Sweating?"

"At this altitude? Heavens no."

"I guess it's true. The shoptalk. Charlie Dark has no nerves."

"No nerves," I agreed, "but plenty of nerve. Cheer up, you may get his fingerprints off the device."

"Gregorius? No chance."

Any of the three could have planted it. We could ask the Venezuelans to interrogate every employee in the hotel to find out who might have expressed an interest in my room but it probably would be fruitless and in any case Gregorius would know as soon as the interrogations started and it would only drive him to ground. No; at least now I knew he was in the hotel.

Scruple can be crippling. If our positions had been reversed—if I'd been Gregorius with one of three men after me—I'd simply kill all three of them. That's how Gregorius would solve the problem.

Sometimes honor is an awful burden. I feel such an anachronism.

The bomb squad lads carried the device out in a heavy armored canister. They wouldn't find clues, not the kind that would help. We already knew the culprit's identity.

Cartlidge said. "What next?"

"Here, " I said, and tapped the mound of my belly, "I know which one he is. But I don't know it here yet." Finger to temple. "It needs to rise to the surface."

"You *know*?"

"In the gut. The gut knows. I have a fact somewhere in there. It's there; I just don't know what it is."

I ordered up two steak dinners from room service and when the tray-table arrived I had Cartlidge's men make sure there were no bombs under the domed metal covers. Then Cartlidge sat and watched with a kind of awed disgust while I ate everything. He

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rolled back his cuff and looked at his watch. "We've only got about fourteen hours."

"I know."

"If you spend the rest of the night in this room he can't get at you. I've got men in the hall and men outside watching the windows. You'll be safe."

"I don't get paid to be safe." I put away the cheesecake—both portions—and felt better.

Of course it might prove to be a bullet, a blade, a drop of poison, a garrote, a bludgeon—it could but it wouldn't. It would be a bomb. He'd challenged me and he'd play it through by his own perverse rules.

Cartlidge complained, "There's just too many places he could hide a satchel bomb. That's the genius of plastique—it's so damn portable."

"And malleable. You can shape it to anything." I looked under the bed, then tried it. Too soft: it sagged near collapse when I lay back. "I'm going to sleep on it."

And so I did until shortly after midnight when someone knocked and I came awake with the reverberating memory of a muffled slam of sound. Cartlidge came into the room carrying a portable radio transceiver—a walkie-talkie. "Bomb went off in one of the elevators."

"Anybody hurt?"

"No. It was empty. Probably it was a grenade—the boys are examining the damage. Here, I meant to give you this thing before. I know you're not much for gizmos and gadgets but it helps us all keep in touch with one another. Even cavemen had smoke signals, right?"

"All right." I thought about the grenade in the elevator and then went back to bed.

In the morning I ordered up two breakfasts; while they were en route I abluted and clothed the physique that Rice detests so vilely. One reason why I don't diet seriously is that I don't wish to cease offending him. For a few minutes then I toyed with Cartlidge's walkie-talkie. It even had my name on it, printed onto a plastic strip.

When Cartlidge arrived under the little dark cloud he always carries above him I was putting on my best tie and a jaunty face.

"What's got you so cheerful?"

"I lost Gregorius once. Today I'm setting it right."

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"You're sure? I hope you're right."

I went down the hall. Cartlidge hurried to catch up; he tugged my sleeve as I reached for the elevator button. "Let's use the fire stairs, all right?" Then he pressed the walkie-talkie into my hand; I'd forgotten it. "He blew up one elevator last night."

"With nobody in it," I pointed out. "Doesn't it strike you as strange? Look, he only grenaded the elevator to stampede me into using the stairs. I suggest you send your bomb-squad lads to check out the stairs. Somewhere between here and the ground floor they'll doubtless find a plastique device wired to a pressure-plate under one of the treads, probably set to detonate under a weight of not less than two hundred and fifty pounds."

He gaped at me, then ran back down the hall to phone. I waited for him to return and then we entered the elevator. His eyes had gone opaque. I pressed the lobby-floor button and we rode down; I could hear his breathing. The doors slid open and we stepped out into the lobby and Cartlidge wiped the sweat off his face. He gave me a wry inquiring look. "I take it you found your fact."

"I think so."

"Want to share it?"

"Not just yet. Not until I'm sure. Let's get to the conference building."

We used the side exit. The car was waiting, engine running, driver armed.

I could have told Cartlidge which one was Gregorius but there was a remote chance I was wrong and I don't like making a fool of myself.

Caracas is a curiously Scandinavian city—the downtown architecture is modern and sterile; even the hillside slums are colorful and appear clean. The wealth of Twentieth Century oil has shaped the city and there isn't much about its superficial appearance, other than the Spanish-language neon signs, to suggest it's a Latin town. Traffic is clotted with big expensive cars and the boulevards are self-consciously elegant. Most of the establishments in the central shopping district are branches of American and European companies—banks, appliances, couturiers, Cadillac showrooms. It doesn't look the sort of place where bombs could go off: terrorism doesn't suit it. One pictures Gregorius and his kind in the shabby crumbling wretched rancid passageways of Cario or Beirut. Caracas? No; too hygienic.

As we parked the car the walkie-talkies crackled with static. It

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was one of Cartlidge's lads—they'd found the armed device on the hotel's fire stairs. I'd been mistaken about one thing: it was a tripwire, not a pressure plate. Again I'd forgotten how indiscriminate Gregorius could be, his indifference to the risk to innocents.

We had 20 minutes before the scheduled arrivals of the ministers. I said, "It'll be here somewhere. The bomb."

"Why?"

"It's the only place he can be sure they'll turn up on schedule. Are the three suspects still under surveillance? Check them out."

He hunched over the walkie-talkie while I turned the volume knob of mine down to get rid of the distracting noise and climbed out of the car and had my look around; I bounced the walkie-talkie in my palm absently while I considered the possibilities. The broad steps of the *palacio* where the conference of OPEC ministers would take place were roped off and guarded by dark-faced cops in Sam Brownes. On the wide landing that separated the two massive flights of steps was a circular fountain that sprayed gaily; normally people sat on the tile ring that contained it but today the security people had cleared the place.

There wasn't much of a crowd; it wasn't going to be the kind of spectacle that would draw any public interest. There was no television equipment; a few reporters clustered off to one side with microphones and tape recorders. Routine traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian. That was useful because it meant Gregorius wouldn't be able to get in close; there would be no crowd to screen him.

Still, it wasn't too helpful. All it meant was that he would use a remote-control device to trigger the bomb.

Cartlidge lowered the walkie-talkie from his face. "Did you hear?"

"No." I had difficulty hearing him now as well: the fountain made white noise, the constant gnashing of water, and I moved closer to him while he scowled at my own walkie-talkie. His eyes accused me forlornly. "Would it kill you to use it? All three accounted for. One in his room, one at the hotel pool, one in the dining room having his breakfast."

I looked up past the rooftops. I could see the upper floors of the Hotel Tamanaco—it sits on high ground on the outskirts—and beyond it the tiny swaying shape of a cable car ascending the lofty mountain. Cotton-ball clouds over the peaks. Caracas is cupped in the palm of the mountains; its setting is fabulous. I said

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to Cartlidge, "He has a thing about stairs, doesn't he."

"What?"

"The Hamburg Bahnhof—the bomb was on the platform stairway. The Cairo job, again stairs. This morning, the hotel fire stairs. That's the thing about stairways—they're funnels." I pointed at the flight of stone steps that led up to the portals of the *palacio*. "The ministers have to climb them to get inside."

"Stone stairs. How could he hide a bomb there? You can't get underneath them. Everything's in plain sight."

I brooded on it. He was right. But it had to be: suddenly I realized it had to be—because I was here and the Saudi's limousine was drawing up at the curb and it meant Gregorius could get both of us with one shot and then I saw the Venezuelan minister walk out of the building and start down the stairs to meet the limousine and it was even more perfect for Gregorius: all three with one explosion. It *had* to be: right here, right now.

Where was the damned thing? Where?

I had the feeling I needed to find the answer within about seven seconds because it was going to take the Venezuelan minister that long to come this far down the steps while the Saudi was getting out of the limousine; already the Venezuelan was nearly down to the fountain and the Saudi was ducking his berobed head and poking a foot out of the car toward the pavement. The entourage of Arab dignitaries had hurried out of the second limousine and they were forming a double column on the steps for the Saudi to walk through; a police captain drew himself to attention, saluting; coming down the stairs the Venezuelan minister had a wide welcoming smile across his austere handsome face.

They'd picked the limousine at random from a motor pool of six. So it couldn't be in the car.

It couldn't be on the steps because the *palacio* had been guarded inside and out for nearly a week and it had been searched half an hour ago by electronic devices, dogs, and human eyes.

It couldn't be in the fountain either. That had been too obvious. We'd exercised special care in searching the fountain; it had only been switched on ten minutes earlier. In any case you can't plant a bomb under water because the water absorbs the force of the explosion and all you get is a big bubble and a waterspout.

In other words there was no way for Gregorius to have planted a bomb here. And yet I knew he had done so. I knew where Gregorius was; I knew he had field glasses to his eyes and his finger

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on the remote-control button that would trigger the bomb by radio signal. When the Saudi met the Venezuelan and they shook hands on the steps not a dozen feet from me, Gregorius would set it off.

Six seconds now. The Venezuelan came past the fountain.

The walkie-talkie in my hand cracked with static but I didn't turn it up. The mind raced at Grand Prix speed. If he didn't plant the bomb beforehand—and I knew he hadn't—then there had to be a delivery system.

Five seconds. Gregorius: cold, brutal, neat, ingenious. Then I knew—*I* was the bomb.

Four seconds and my arm swung back. It has been a long time since I threw a football and I had to pray the instinct was still in the arm and then I was watching the walkie-talkie soar over the Venezuelan's head and I could only stand and watch while it lofted and descended. It struck the near lip of the fountain and for a moment it looked ready to fall back onto the stairs, but then it tipped over the rim and went into the water.

His reaction time would be slowed by distance and the awkwardness of handling binoculars and the unexpectedness of my move. Instinctively he reached for the trigger button, but by the time he pressed it the walkie-talkie had gone into the water. The explosion wasn't loud. Water blistered at the surface and a crack appeared in the surrounding rim; little spouts began to break through the shattered concrete; a great frothy mushroom of water bubbled up over the surface and cascaded down the steps.

Nobody was hurt.

We went into the hotel fast. I was talking to Cartlidge: "I assume the one who's still upstairs in his room is the blond one with the crew cut."

"How the hell did you know that?"

"He's Gregorius. He had to have a vantage point."

Gregorius was still there in the room because he'd had no reason to believe we'd tumbled to his identity. He was as conceited as I; he was sure he hadn't made any mistake to give himself away. He was wrong of course. He'd made only one but it was enough.

Cartlidge's bomb-squad lads were our flying wedge. They kicked the door in and we walked right in on him and he looked at all the guns and decided to sit still.

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His window overlooked the *palacio* and the binoculars were on the sill. I said to Cartlidge, "Have a look for the transmitter. He hasn't had time to hide it too far away."

The Blond said, "What is this about?" All injured innocence.

I said, "It's finished, Gregorius."

He wasn't going to admit a thing but I did see the brief flash of rage in his eyes; it was all the confirmation I needed. I gave him my best Rice smile. "You'll be pleased to talk in time."

They searched him, handcuffed him, gave the room a toss, and didn't find anything; later that day the transmitter turned up in a cleaning-supplies cupboard down the hall.

To this day Cartlidge still isn't sure we got the right man because nobody ever told him what happened after we got Gregorius back to the States. Rice and I know the truth. The computer kids in Debriefing sweated Gregorius for weeks and finally he broke and they're still analyzing the wealth of information he has supplied. I'd lost interest by that time; my part of it was finished and I knew from the start that I'd got the right man. I don't make that kind of mistake; it didn't need confirmation from the shabby hypodermics of Debriefing. As I'd said to Rice, "The binoculars on the windowsill clinched it, of course. When the Venezuelan and the Saudi shook hands he planned to trigger it—it was the best way to hit all three of us. But I knew it had to be the Blond much earlier. I suppose I might have arrested him first before we went looking for the bomb but I wasn't absolutely certain."

"Don't lie," Rice said. "You wanted him to be watching you in his binoculars—you wanted him to know you were the one who defused him. One of these days your brain's going to slow down a notch or two. Next time maybe it'll blow up before you throw it in the pond. But all right, since you're waiting for me to ask—how did you pick the blond one?"

"We knew until recently he'd worn his hair hippie length."

"So?"

"I saw him at the pool toweling himself dry. I saw him shake his head back the way you do when you want to get the hair back out of your eyes. He had a crew cut. He wouldn't have done that unless he'd cut his hair so recently he still had the old habit."

Rice said, "It took you twelve hours to figure that out? You *are* getting old, Charlie."

"And hungry. Have you got anything to eat around here?"

"No."

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a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA CALLAHAN

One thing we are sure of: To judge from the stories Barbara Callahan has conceived and written so far, she will never repeat herself. In this story she has changed her literary course: it simply means the lady is willing to take chances, the writer Barbara Callahan is growing . . .

BARBARIAN AT THE GATE

by *BARBARA CALLAHAN*

H. Harold Hopkins went out for Chinese food, allowing me approximately a half hour to decide how to murder him. H. Harold had me so muddled this afternoon that I couldn't devise a good plan to dispose of him. He spent hours trying to convince me to write a book for his publishing company simply because I'm a gorgeous secretary who works on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

I've been working on a manuscript but H. Harold flatly refused to believe that I am completing an up-to-date translation of Virgil's *The Aeneid.* He laughed when I told him I'm a classical scholar. Tears of merriment dribbled down his cheeks when I told him that I will soon finish the draft of *The Aeneid* because I can type 80 words per minute.

"Honey, you're terrific," he said. "With your looks and your sense of humor, no wonder that dirty old senator was crazy about you."

The Chinese food H. Harold brings back to my apartment will be the last bit of nourishment he ever takes. When he called Virgil Gibbons a dirty old senator, he set the date for H. Harold's execution as well as the menu for his last meal.

Virgil Gibbons, R-Indiana, was the noblest senator of them all. Virgil, I'm sorry to say, has left Washington to gambol forever on

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the Elysian Fields with his wife Hannah who predeceased him by a month. Now that Virgil and Hannah are gone, I will continue their most cherished work, the translation of *The Aeneid* of the Latin poet for whom Virgil was named.

When Senator Gibbons and his wife learned that I had received an award for Latin in high school, they welcomed me aboard their project. However, weeks passed before I could become an active translator. I was constantly working overtime at the Hill. When other senators heard the speedy rhythm of my typewriter, they besieged me with high-priority items to type for them. Confronted with a document ominously titled "Eyes Only: Senatorial Committee for the Investigation of Itinerant Isotopes; Staff, Junior Staff, Clerical Personnel, and Junior Clerical Personnel," how could I refuse to type it without feeling as if bombs would explode all over the world and that I would be an accessory to the holocaust?

Hannah finally set me straight.

"Doris," she said, "you're being used. You should have never let those senators know that you can type eighty words per minute because now they won't let you alone. Come along with me."

I jogged behind Hannah, who at 75 subscribed to the dictum of a sound mind in a sound body, all the way to Maxine's Maison de Beauté where I spent several hours acquiring a new hairdo, centipede eyelashes, and a redecorated face. The limp brown hair I usually garrotted into a severe bun now cascaded in blonde torrents down my back as I jogged behind Hannah to Brenda's Boutique where I was outfitted with clinging polyester dresses and platform shoes of an altitude to cause vertigo in Sir Edmund Hillary.

"Your own Latin teacher wouldn't recognize you now, Doris," chuckled Hannah, "nor would she want to. Virgil will announce he has a new secretary named Lola and in the finest 'old boy' tradition of the Senate, those vultures will back off with their typing demands."

"But, Hannah," I moaned. "I still type eighty words per minute. Maxine and Brenda can't change that."

"You can keep the eighty words per," snapped Hannah. "I want you to finish Virgil's work every day so you can translate at night. If the senators still come bounding into your office when they hear you type, just hit the letter H."

"The letter H?"

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"Sure. Just hit it with your index finger. Then bat your new eyelashes at the vultures about to slip you another high-priority document, 'Eyes Only: United States, Saturn, and Mars,' and giggle, 'I love hitting this key. It makes me sound like I can really type.' Believe me, those senators will skitter out fast."

The metamorphosis of Doris the Drab to Lola the Luscious succeeded in liberating me from overtime. None of the senators except Virgil considered me capable of anything but filing, and filing my nails, at that. Each evening promptly at five I left the office to join Virgil and Hannah at their Watergate apartment. After a health food dinner the three of us reverently translated the words of the master, the other Virgil. Our work advanced with all the speed of Ben Hur's chariot, making a pit stop only once when Virgil was recovering from an injury. His left shoulder became dislocated from playful punches delivered by his colleagues in the Senate whenever they saw him leaving the office with me.

"Virgil, you sly old devil," they chortled while administering right jabs to his shoulder.

Now Virgil is gone, having succumbed to his grief over the death of Hannah who passed into the Elysian Fields after being nudged there by a heavy bust of Cicero which she knocked over in her apartment while doing jumping jacks, her favorite exercise. Vowing to complete my friends' work, I wrote to Pindar Press in New York and inquired about sending the manuscript to them.

Enter H. Harold Hopkins, the barbarian at the gate.

Getting entangled with H. Harold is my own fault. As I searched the yellow pages of the New York City phone directory, looking for an appropriate publisher for *The Aeneid*, the name Pindar leaped out at me. Although Pindar was a Greek poet, I thought that an organization named after a poet of antiquity would be interested in the work of a Latin poet as well. If not, I thought Pindar Press would gladly steer me to a publisher of Latin translations. Victimized by my glamorous image, I had stopped wearing my glasses. I erroneously copied the address of the publisher listed just above Pindar Press. I sent a letter outlining my work with Senator Virgil Gibbons to Pander Press, publishers of potboilers, and employers of H. Harold Hopkins, junior editor.

Pander Press wants me to write a lurid account of my years with Virgil Gibbons. Pander Press couldn't care less about the

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translation of the other Virgil's work. According to H. Harold, the editors at Pander are eagerly awaiting titillating stories of grape-peeling orgies.

The barbarian at the gate, H. Harold Hopkins, 25-year-old impresario of vulgarity, showed me Pander's proposed cover drawing for the book I'll never write. On it Virgil Gibbons is wearing a rumpled toga and a tilted laurel wreath. Shoeless and wearing a short tunic, I am draped across Virgil's lap feeding him a grape. Virgil looks like a pudgy satyr and I look like a Vestal Virgin about to be drummed out of the corps.

"This cover will sell the book, Lola baby. You just fill in the usual orgy stuff. If you need any help, Pander's got an editor in charge of ribald research who will be glad to help you out. He can also spell and punctuate, a real Renaissance Man, you might say."

I sighed. "H. Harold, you don't seem to understand that I had a platonic relationship with Senator Gibbons."

"Platonic, hey, that's great. Put that in your book. We don't mind anything kinky."

Silently imploring the spirits of Hannah and Virgil to deliver me from the barbarian, I received another blow.

"The title you picked for the book is great, Lola. Pander is crazy about it. It tells of the joyous sensuality of your affair with the senator. *I Sing of Arms and the Man*. What a title!"

I heard a terrible noise but H. Harold didn't seem to hear it. Virgil, Hannah, and the other Virgil, had simultaneously turned over in their graves.

"H. Harold," I asked with patrician control, "are you at all familiar with the written word or were you educated solely by film strip?"

"What's the problem, baby?"

"The problem is that I included the words 'I sing of arms and the man' in my letter as a salutation to an editor I thought was a fellow classicist. 'I sing of arms and the man' are the first seven words of *The Aeneid*. The man referred to is Aeneas."

"No problem at all, Lola. We can still use the general idea of those words for a title. We'll jiggle the words around a bit so we don't run into any legal troubles with that poet's heirs. How's this? *Man, Do I Sing of Arms and the Man!* With an exclamation point at the end we'll sell two million copies."

Mentally honing an exclamation point to the sharpness of a dagger, I considered dividing H. Harold's monumental gall into

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three parts, a rumination which led me to think of ax murder as a proper method of disposal. I rejected that modus operandi as too messy.

With ten minutes remaining until H. Harold returned with Chinese food, I hadn't a notion of how to do away with him. Whenever I tried to concentrate, my mind replayed a scene in which H. Harold had distorted a precious memory. I wept when I thought of how he had twisted Virgil's and my visit to a motel into a lewd escapade.

"In your book," he advised, "be sure to write about the night you and the senator got juiced up and fell into the fountain in the lobby of the Millard Fillmore Motel."

Wearily I tried to explain to H. Harold that Virgil and I had left Hannah to the translation so that we could visit the fountain in the lobby of the motel to study it as a possible model for the fountain Virgil wanted to build in the atrium of his retirement home. Virgil wanted to get an idea of the depth of the pool surrounding the fountain, so he rolled up his trousers, took off his shoes, and waded into the pool. Unfortunately he slipped on the coins tossed into the pool by guests. As he teetered, I reached for him, missed, and fell into the pool too. A photograph appeared in the papers with the caption, "Drunken Senator Takes Dive with Secretary."

"The incident at the Millard Fillmore was misinterpreted," I told H. Harold. "Virgil was simply scouting the fountain for his atrium."

"For his what-ium?" asked H. Harold.

"For the central court of his house, his atrium."

"A likely stor-ium," snorted H. Harold. "And I suppose you have an innocent explanation for the lunch hours when you and the senator and another woman disappeared into his conference room, locking the door behind you. Tell me you weren't involved in what the French call a Manage at Twah."

"*Ménage-à-trois,* H. Harold," I corrected.

"Right," he said.

"Wrong. Virgil and I had engaged Cassandra Delphi, the noted psychic, as a medium to contact Hannah after she died. Virgil and I desperately wanted to know if she was jogging regularly in the Elysian Fields. Each lunch hour we adjourned with Cassandra to the conference room for a séance. However, we learned only that Caesar and Brutus are still not speaking, and that Cassius of the

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lean and hungry look has gained some weight. Virgil became so depressed over our failure to contact Hannah that he died of a broken heart."

The memory of those futile sessions with Cassandra filled me with sorrow and I began to cry. H. Harold stared stonily at me, unmoved by my tears. Suddenly he jumped up.

"I've got it. I know what your game is. You've deliberately depicted your life with Virgil as dull because you're cleverly holding out for more money. You won't begin to write *Man, Do I Sing of Arms and the Man*! in the style of Pander Press until you're offered a bigger advance, a higher percentage of royalties, a cut of the movie deal. Okay, let's talk turkey. And speaking of turkey, I'm starved. I don't suppose you stock your fridge with anything but grapes for the orgies, do you, baby? I think I'll go out and get us some Chinese food."

With the countdown to the return of H. Harold and the Chinese food at five minutes and no holding, I still hadn't the slightest idea of how to send him to his appointment with Charon the Boatman to the Underworld at the River Styx.

"O tempus fugit," I cried. "O, for a lightning bolt of inspiration! O, for a sign from Hannah or Virgil."

My prayers were rewarded. Hannah's picture toppled off the coffee table, giving me the prompting I needed. When the doorbell rang, I coquettishly admitted the barbarian at the gate. H. Harold loved the way I crushed Chinese noodles and popped them into his mouth.

"A carry-out orgy," he chuckled. "I knew you'd change your tune when the price for your book went up."

"You're so understanding, H. Harold," I cooed, "that I'm going to take you where the action was, right to the Watergate apartment, the scene of the orgies."

"Right on!" yelled H. Harold, jumping up and knocking me and the noodles to the floor.

On the way to the Watergate complex H. Harold asked, "Hey, didn't something else sensational happen there once?"

"Nothing of interest to Pander Press," I assured him.

As I crossed the threshold of the apartment of my dear departed friends, I was overwhelmed by sadness, enervated by grief. For a moment I felt as if I could not carry out my plan to dispose of H. Harold. Ironically his own words sealed his fate.

"Great place here. I like all this Roman stuff. I'll tell you some-

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thing I tell almost nobody. The H in front of Harold stands for Horatius, the Roman dude who held the bridge over the Tiber against the Etruscans. My mother was a Latin freak like you are. She named me after Horatius because she hoped I'd always be determined and never give up. The name worked. I never give up. I always get my man, or woman, as in your case. Back at Pander Press they think the H stands for Hound. They know I never return until the contract is signed."

"I'm glad you told me all that, Horatius. Come into the dining room, please."

"Sure, baby. Lead me to those grapes."

There were no grapes in the dining room, only the beautifully polished furniture and the classic Roman busts tastefully arranged around the table.

"It was in here, H. Harold, that we commenced the orgies. Phase One always included strenuous exercising."

"Sensually paratus," grinned H. Harold.

"Yes. And now let me demonstrate. You stand right there. I always positioned myself back here. I started with those exercises called jumping jacks because of their great arm and leg movements. Instead of counting as I exercised, I always declined Latin words. Here goes: hic, haec, hoc, huius, huius, huius, huic, huic, huic, whoops, whoops whoops."

"Ummph," said H. Harold as the bronze bust of Marcus Aurelius dislodged by my flailing arms toppled from its pedestal, hitting H. Harold's head and sending the Junior Editor of Pander Press on a voyage to the underworld where he'd encounter people with more interesting stories than mine. H. Harold could compile an anthology titled *Ladies from Hades*.

Apologizing to Marcus Aurelius, I promised to have him repaired as I had Cicero who had fallen on Hannah. When I rang the police to inform them of H. Harold's unfortunate "accident," I knew I would not have to worry about being hounded by another junior editor from Pander Press. I smiled at Caesar Augustus, Horace, Petronius, Catullus, Marc Antony, Pliny the Elder, and Terence, perched on their pedestals, noble Romans all, standing at the ready to strike down any barbarian at the gate.

"Q"

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The story of something that happened to Stanley, something most people dream will happen to them one day. A tremendous stroke of good fortune—hitting the jackpot—can be "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd," but it can sometimes carry a heavy price tag . . .

THE $50,000 GOOF

by A. R. SWINNERTON

Stanley lit a cigarette and shoved his cup across the kitchen table. His wife refilled it and warmed up her own. "You smoke too much," she said, cradling the cup in her hands.

"And you remind me too much," he said, leaning back. "Since we're in a picky mood, did I ever tell you your name Vicki sounds like a twerpy free-lance playgirl in some dumb novel?"

"Who fell in love with a dumb working stiff named Stanley and they lived unhappily ever after. Only thing, his real name was Stanislaus, and he changed it for ethnical reasons. Right, Stanislaus?"

He grinned. "Anyway, Stanislaus loves Vicki."

"And while we're going one-on-one, let's mention your briefcase."

"Attaché case."

"Whatever. Don't you feel a little foolish carrying a brown-paper bag in a $40 lunchbox?"

"That case," he said, "is my—our—passport to a better life, little Vicki. Any day now some graying corporate executive will spot me on the third stool at Bernie's, and as he gauges the casual way I break a ten-dollar bill and the predatory hunch of my shoulders, he'll put a hand on my arm and tell me I'm now in charge of the southwest territory for American Rack and Pinion. It'll happen, Vicki."

She walked behind him and kissed the top of his head. "Don't they make fun of you at the office?"

"Those nerds. Little do they know that a man has to look the part before he takes high office. They call me Mr. Dow Jones, they ring me on the intercom and tell me to buy a thousand

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shares of Wisconsin Brick—stuff like that. But—hey, a funny thing happened on the way home, Vicki. I mean at noon, when I was coming back from lunch. I ate outside, on a bench in the square. The sun felt good. I closed and locked my case, and just as I passed in front of the Tower a man bumped into me. Not hard, more like a nudge. I turned when he turned. He looked me right in the eye for a second, nodded, and said 'Jilly'."

"He called you Jilly?"

"Like he knew me and I knew him—that kind of look. As if there was something between us we both knew about."

"What did he look like?"

"Needed a shave, wore a faded leather jacket, dark cap, and—"

"There you go, Stanislaus! Could be your graying corporate exec, from Amalgamated Bump and Grind. An undercover talent scout, Stan."

"But he knew me, I swear. Or thought he did. And I never saw him before."

Just for the fun of it, she called him Jilly off and on until she saw it was wearing thin. She packed his lunch each day in the attaché case, and to give it more heft, he kept it stocked with some old paperbacks and some blank scratch pads. Packed and ready to go, it weighed about 15 pounds, just right for swinging a bit as he walked.

In his off-white topcoat with spread collar and wide lapels, he did look like a young man on the way up. His step was brisk, his gray eyes were clear and alert. Once he passed a parked TV truck and joined a small crowd before a crew doing sidewalk interviews on the proposed city income-tax boost. The camera edged closer, but just as it turned toward him, the reporter gave a wrap-up sign, gathered up his gear, and drove off.

A minute sooner, he thought, and he could have been in the middle of the six o'clock news, speaking out articulately and forcefully on the issue. Damn!

Somebody bumped into him. Turning quickly and craning his neck, he recognized the back of Leather Jacket, hurrying away.

He hung his coat and hat in his locker after lunch, glanced in the washroom mirror, then picked up his attaché case. At the door he stopped, remembering the cigarettes in his topcoat pocket. Dipping down, his hand brushed something. It was a note, folded unevenly, under the pack of cigarettes.

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Someone came into the washroom. Stan thrust the note and cigarettes into his pocket, grabbed his attaché case, and hurried back to his desk. He put the case behind him against a wall, lit a cigarette, and unfolded the note.

It had been torn from a sheet of a yellow-lined legal pad into a six-inch square. Printed in pencil, across rather than on the horizontal lines, were the words *BERNIES AT FIVE. BRING THE USUAL.*

The phone rang. He stared down at the note as his supervisor reminded him to have the small-loan survey ready in an hour. He nodded, as if the caller could see him. Force of habit. Someone called, Stanley nodded. Someone else stuffed a note in his pocket, Stanley responded. It was a crazy world, peopled by masters and slaves. Hadn't changed since the pyramid builders.

Pushing himself, he finished the report and delivered it. Clearing a space on his desk, he studied the note again, going over his lunch hour step by step which led him to his last stop, the TV reporter. There was the quick nudge from Leather Jacket. It all fit together.

Leather Jacket knew him, or thought he did. He had either followed him or crossed his path by design. He had seen Stanley at least three times in broad daylight, called him by the name Jilly, looking him square in the eye. What the hell was going on?

Bring the usual, the note said. Stanley underlined it, swiveled around in his chair, and stared at his case. Each time he'd seen Leather Jacket he'd been carrying the case. He felt his face flush, wondering if those stupid nerds at the office were trying to pull some kind of practical joke they would laugh about for months.

He opened the case and examined it. Inside were the remains of his lunch, some scratch pads, and the paperbacks he'd picked up here and there—nothing incriminating. Or valuable. He leafed through the books and pads for notes or clues, examined the back pocket of the case for heroin, jewels, microfilm, or salacious photographs. Nothing.

It couldn't be an office prank, he decided. They were too cheap to hire Leather Jacket, not creative enough to invent him. It was now 3:30. Time sure flew, he thought, when you were having fun. Should he call Vicki? No, no. She'd burst out laughing and he wouldn't blame her. Some things sound dull when you retell them, like getting stranded on the highway in a snowstorm. You have to be there.

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His day ended at 4:30 but he stayed till 4:45, then headed for Bernie's, his stomach a little fluttery. At the bar he ordered a martini, keeping an eye on his case resting on the footledge. He could touch it with his leg.

The bar was crowded, voices blending in a muted alcoholic chorus. Someone waved, he waved back. On a shelf a TV set beamed its messages, unnoticed. It was exactly 5:00.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, saw the stubbled face, then the leather jacket. "Refill?" asked the bartender. Stan turned his head, covered his glass with his hand. When he looked back again, he saw the door swing shut.

The case was still on the ledge. A strange kettle of codfish, he thought, stirring his drink. What he needed was someone to talk to about it. Good idea. "I'm coming home," he said to Vicki on the phone. "And you can't stop me."

He heard her laugh and he felt silly. "Hey," he mumbled. "Vicki? Suppose Alexander Graham Bell got a busy signal the first time he used the phone? Anyway, I want you to know I'm coming home. G'bye."

She met him at the door, kissing him. "Oh, my," she said, "you're full of booze, bucky." She took his briefcase and coat, glancing at the case. "You should never trade down, Stan. Makes bad vibes."

He tried to shush her. "Okay, but wait till I—what do you mean, trade down?"

"The Madison Avenue lunchbox, sweetie. It's the same size, but it's tacky. Definitely not a name brand."

He carried it into the living room and dropped it on a chair. "Looks like," said Vicki, "your ticket to the Ivory Tower has been punched, Stanislaus. Someone must have pulled a switcheroo at the bar."

Sweating a little, he tried his key. "Get me a screwdriver," he said, flipping up the two side latches. Forcing the blade of the tool beneath the tongue of the hasp, he pried it up until it sprang open.

Fingers on the corners, he gently raised the lid. Inside, arranged in neat ranks, were packets of green, sorted, wrapped, and marked. "Good lord!" whispered Vicki, touching a packet with her fingertip. "Is it real, Stan?"

He riffled one of the packets. "Real, used, and unmarked. Should I count it, or estimate it?"

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"Count it, dammit. Soil your hands on the filthy stuff."

There were fifty packets, each totaling $1000, in fifties, twenties, and tens. "Fifty . . . fifty thou," said Vicki, choking on the number. "Hot damn, Stan!"

He held his hands over the bills. "I can feel a warm glow, Vicki, like the sun on your back at Acapulco."

"Yeah, or a third-degree burn from hot money. Somewhere out there in the city, there's someone with your case, looking at what's left of your lunch and those dumb books. Whoever it is, even though he may be a reasonable person, he's not going to consider it a fair trade, is he?"

He dug the note out of his pocket. "I don't know why, but I had to go there. To Bernie's at five. The man who called me Jilly came there. He grabbed my shoulder, and when the bartender asked me about another drink, Leather Jacket switched cases. I didn't notice it then."

"You were too high. I mean, on the stool."

"I know, I know. Somehow he's identified me as his contact. Someone he knows who looks a lot like me."

"Which means your case was supposed to have something else in it, right?"

He scratched his head. "You could say that. Now what do I do?"

"Take it to the police?"

"Vicki, this isn't your routine lost-and-found deal. And it isn't finders keepers, either. Somebody made an upper-bracket mistake, and he wouldn't like it if I tell him the police have the money."

"I—I'm scared, Stan."

He ran a fingernail across the rows of bills. "Let's say we've been appointed temporary custodians." He closed the case and fastened the latches. "Shove it under our bed, for now. I've got to think."

She leaned down and kissed him. "Gee, it's just like you said, Stan. Some big exec spotted you and your case, then paid you a year's salary in advance."

He stared down at the street. "I know," he said. "Now all I have to do is earn it."

Stan called in sick the next day. "I'm upset," he said. Vicki nodded, watching as he paced the apartment. "How long can we go without groceries?"

"A couple of days," she said. "If you conserve your strength."

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At three he slipped down and got the mail and the paper. "Why do I feel so guilty?" he said, spreading the paper out on the kitchen table. "I haven't done a damn thing wrong, Vicki."

"Except take a day off. Give me part of the paper."

"Is the money still under the bed?"

"You know it is. You just looked."

He shoved the paper aside. "I never thought having money could be such a—"

"Responsibility?" She patted his hand. "Then let's ditch it. Grab a crosstown bus and leave it on the seat."

"I'm not that nervous about it."

"Oh? Then it's not the money, is it? It's wondering if you'd be more upset keeping it or losing it, isn't that it?"

"Yeah," he grunted. "Afraid of Leather Jacket. He spotted me before and he can do it again. Then I keep wondering what the money represents. Was it for a drug buy, an underworld payoff, like to a hit man?"

"No, I don't think so. Not that. Remember the note? It said to bring the usual, which sounds more like a regular delivery."

"Until I intercepted." He snuffed out his cigarette. "Don't forget my attaché case, Vicki. That's how he spotted me, why he thought I was—"

"Bagman?"

He winced. "If I'd been carrying a brown-paper bag, he'd never have mistaken me for Jilly. I was trapped by my own ego."

For a moment she watched him on his aimless prowl, then turned back to the paper. All she saw were the pictures, the column heads, as if she were window shopping. She skipped over fires, prison breaks, indictments, drug busts, a Hollywood suicide, scrambled together with fall fashions, cigarette and supermarket ads. Life, death, and the profit motive, existing side by side, and I'm a philosopher.

Centered at the top of the last page of the News Section was a police photo of two men, taken separately but printed side by side. Vicki's eyes flicked over them, wandered toward the next section, then pounced back. "Stan!" she said, her voice choking. "Good lord . . . Stan!"

He hurried in from the bedroom, stared down at her pointing finger. "The one on the left, Stan. He looks like you!"

It wasn't a studio portrait, but even under police-station conditions the resemblance was apparent. Same thick hair grown down

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on the forehead, same wide-spread eyes, slightly lumpy nose and full mouth. "Not *exactly* like you, Stan. It's as if your face had been case-hardened, with all the gentleness gone."

"The other guy," said Stan, tapping the picture on the right. "Him. He's the guy who called me Jilly. Leather Jacket. That's him, Vicki! The one who switched cases on me."

"Then that explains it."

"How?"

"Both of them were found in an alley, shot. By each other, the police think, but they're still checking. Near one of the bodies they found an attaché case. It was open, contents scattered, but it contained nothing of value."

"Probably mine. But I won't claim it."

"Right. Look, it's over, case closed. The contact man who called you Jilly is dead, and the man he mistook you for is in the same condition. The only loose end is the case full of all that beautiful money, and we've got that. Don't you see? We're home-free!"

He read the blocked-in story below the pictures, studied the photos again. "Listen," said Vicki. "Was there anything, I mean anything, in your case that could be traced to you?"

"I don't think so. I paid cash for it, at a discount store. No sales record."

"Any book markers from the office—where'd you get the books?"

"Old ones I picked up. There'll be fingerprints, but my prints aren't on record anywhere."

She sat down beside him. "I'm still worried, though. For the first time since we've been married, I'm worried. We just hit the jackpot, yet we're in a stew, aren't we? We're not criminals. We don't know anyone who is, so we can't handle this the way they would. If we start asking innocent little questions, we'll attract the kind of people who carry weapons with long blades and short barrels. We—"

"Hold it. You're dramatizing. It's—"

"Listen, Stan. We can't keep that much money here, like in a cookie jar. If we bank it, then the I.R.S. will not only want a reasonable explanation how we got it, but they'll want about thirty percent off the top. Right?"

"Wait. Suppose we live out of the suitcase, use it for cash. I deposit my paycheck in a bank, which is like laundering the money. Then you get a job to explain our larger savings account, which—"

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She put her arms around him. "And we'd both be working harder than we are now, wouldn't we? How do we come out ahead? We could do that without that suitcase in there."

"I don't care!" he said. "I carried that damn case for three years. Most of the time I felt like an idiot. Mr. Dow Jones, getting ribbed. Then it paid off big, I mean real big, and all you can do is tell me how bad off we are. Damn it, Vicki—"

A sharp rap on the door cut him off. "Whoever it is must have heard us," said Vicki. "See who it is, Stan. Go on."

More knocks. "Police," someone said behind the door.

"Make them show their ID," said Vicki. "I'm scared, Stan."

He opened the door against the chain. The two men in plainclothes flashed their badges and cards. "Lieutenant Dooley," said the older one, smiling. "And Sergeant Kimbrough. May we come in?"

Stan shut the door, then unhooked the chain. "Thanks," said Dooley. "Nice place, hmmm." He held up the case in his hand. "Does this belong to you?"

Stan knew it was his. "I . . . I'm not sure."

"No problem," said Kimbrough, spreading his hands. "Must be a million of these things around. Might help if we open it." He flipped back the side latches and moved the middle button. "There we go," he said, lifting the lid. "Look familiar?"

Strewn inside were the books, the scratch pads, and the brown-paper bag. "About the way we found it," said Dooley. "More or less. Think it might be yours?"

Glancing at Vicki, Stan pawed clumsily through the books. "Yeah," he mumbled. "Looks like it. Thanks for finding it."

Dooley waved. "No trouble at all. Just doing our job. But while we're here, we thought we could kill two birds, the way Kimbrough put it. Is that a fair quote, Kimbie?"

"On the nose, Dooley. We thought we'd return your property and pick up someone else's. Which might or might not be here, on the premises."

Stan tried to say something but Vicki ran into the bedroom and brought out the other case. "Here," she blurted, holding out the case as if it were hot. "Here. Take it, get it out of here!"

The two detectives opened the case and made exclamatory comments about the amount of green. "Could we sit down?" Dooley said. "My metatarsals are killing me."

Without waiting, he dropped into a chair, cradling the case in

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his lap. "Not you, Kimbrough. Look alive, man. This pair of desperados might make a break for it. Would you do that, Stanley?"

Stanley muttered something inaudible and moved closer to Vicki. Dooley studied them thoughtfully. "All right," he said. "Here's how we put it together. Tell us if we're wrong."

He relit his cigar, then took a newspaper clipping from his coat pocket and handed it to Stan. "Man on the left, Elton Koodersahl, known as Jilly. Remind you of someone, Stanley? Man on the right, Willie Manno, errand boy for our local dirty-money entrepreneurs. Now Willie, he picks up certain bundles of cash, then delivers them to his man Jilly, who in turn makes still another drop. It's like a slow-speed relay, except the stakes are bigger. Okay. Dumbo Willie, he goofs. He identifies you as Jilly, makes contact, sets up a time and place, and the switch is made. Any omissions or corrections so far?"

Stan shook his head. "He even called me Jilly."

"Yeah. What we might call a touch of Damon Runyon, Stanley. Willie may be dumb, but he ain't stupid. Sooner or later he checks his baggage and then he gets scared. And mad. He tracks down the real Jilly, and in the final dramatic scene in that back alley a double homicide occurs. In my precinct." He pointed to the case. "You count this?"

"No," said Vicki, before Stan could open his mouth. "We were afraid. How . . . how did you trace it here to us? Stan's case?"

Sergeant Kimbrough opened the case, took out the brown-paper bag, and from its wrinkled insides pulled out a small white envelope. Vicki gasped. "I forgot all about—"

He held up a hand. "You've got a thoughtful wife, Stanley. Listen to this. 'Dear Stanislaus—Don't you dare forget my birthday this year. Bring me something nice. Vicki'."

Stan's face turned red. "I never saw it, Vicki. I missed it."

"When I saw all that money," she said, "I forgot about the card."

"What we did," said Kimbrough, "was try to trace the card. If it had been an old one you had around here for a while, we'd have been out of luck. Found half a dozen stores that carried that brand name, and one where the clerk thought she remembered who bought it. The stationery store right across the street from here. The clerk said you lived in the neighborhood, so Dooley and me, with our sophisticated police technology, began knocking on apartment doors. It was fun, wasn't it, Dooley?"

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"It's a living," said Dooley. "You say you didn't count this?"

"We've been scared to death ever since Stan brought it home," said Vicki. "It really wasn't ours, was it?"

Dooley shrugged. "Ours neither, but we've got it. And next time, Stanley, call us, will you? Help lighten our load."

In the doorway he gave them a little wave and the two men disappeared down the corridor. Vicki waited a few moments, checked the hall, then threw her arms around Stan. "They're gone," she said, kissing him. "Oh, I feel so relieved!"

He held her close. "Me too. Except for losing the fifty thou."

"I know, I know. But now that I think about it, it was more like forty-five. In that neighborhood."

"What's the difference, Vicki? We counted fifty, both of us, but—" He pushed her back, shook her gently. "Vicki, you didn't—"

She buried her face against him. "Gamblers call it skimming, I think. In our case, a finder's fee. Our ten percent, Stan. Unmarked bills, just one of those nice handy packets, Stan. We earned it. You did. I mean, with your forty-dollar lunchbox. Let's go out and celebrate, then buy me something for my birthday. Something real nice."

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a *NEW* short story by

LAWRENCE BLOCK

Melville Davisson Post created at least six important characters in the history of the detective-crime short story—Uncle Abner (his greatest concept), Monsieur Jonquelle, Sir Henry Marquis, Colonel Braxton, Walker of the Secret Service, and Randolph Mason. In some ways Randolph Mason was his most complex and unusual character. In the beginning (1896) Randolph Mason was a "criminal" lawyer, an unscrupulous attorney who used the inadequacies and weaknesses of the law itself to defeat justice—a new approach to the crime story wherein "the punishing power of the State might be baffled." In the third and last book of Randolph Mason stories (1908), Post changed his criminological course: Randolph Mason reformed and began using his vast legal knowledge to aid rather than to defeat justice, becoming "more a detective than a lawyer."

In this story Lawrence Block introduces a new character—Martin H. Ehrengraf, a lawyer filling the double pair of footprints left in the genre seventy years ago by Post's Randolph Mason . . .

THE EHRENGRAF METHOD

by *LAWRENCE BLOCK*

"And you are Mrs. Culhane," Martin Ehrengraf said. "Do sit down, yes, I think you will find that chair comfortable. And please pardon the disarray. It is the natural condition of my office. Chaos stimulates me. Order stifles me. It is absurd, isn't it, but then so is life itself, eh?"

Dorothy Culhane sat, nodded. She studied the small, trimly built man who remained standing behind his extremely disorderly

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desk. Her eyes took in the narrow mustache, the thin lips, the deeply set dark eyes. If the man liked clutter in his surroundings, he certainly made up for it in his grooming and attire. He wore a starched white shirt, a perfectly tailored dove-gray three-button suit, a narrow dark-blue necktie.

Oh, but she did not want to think about neckties—

"Of course you are Clark Culhane's mother," Ehrengraf said. "I thought you had already retained an attorney."

"Alan Farrell."

"A good man," Ehrengraf said. "An excellent reputation."

"I dismissed him this morning."

"Ah."

Mrs. Culhane took a deep breath. "He wanted Clark to plead guilty," she said. "Temporary insanity, something of the sort. He wanted my son to admit killing that girl."

"And you did not wish him to do this."

"My son is innocent!" The words came in a rush, uncontrollably. She calmed herself. "My son is innocent," she repeated, levelly now. "He could never kill anyone. He can't admit to a crime he never committed in the first place."

"And when you said as much to Farrell—"

"He told me he was doubtful of his ability to conduct a successful defense based on a plea of innocence." She drew herself up. "So I decided to find someone who could."

"And you came to me."

"Yes."

The little lawyer had seated himself. Now he was doodling idly on a lined yellow legal pad. "Do you know much about me, Mrs. Culhane?"

"Not very much. It's said that your methods are unorthodox—"

"Indeed."

"But that you get results."

"Results. Indeed, results." Martin Ehrengraf made a tent of his fingertips and for the first time since she had entered his office, a smile bloomed briefly on his thin lips. "Indeed I get results. I *must* get results, my dear Mrs. Culhane, or else I do not get my dinner. And while my slimness might indicate otherwise, it is my custom to eat very well indeed. You see, I do something which no other criminal lawyer does, at least not to my knowledge. You have heard what this is?"

"I understand you operate on a contingency basis."

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"A contingency basis." Ehrengraf was nodding emphatically. "Yes, that is precisely what I do—operate on a contingency basis. My fees are high, Mrs. Culhane—extremely high. But they are due and payable only in the event that my efforts are crowned with success. If a client of mine is found guilty, then my work on his behalf at least costs him nothing."

The lawyer got to his feet again, stepped out from behind his desk. Light glinted on his highly polished black shoes. "This is common enough in negligence cases. The attorney gets a share in the settlement. If he loses he gets nothing. How much greater is his incentive to perform to the best of his ability, eh? But why limit this practice to negligence suits? Why not have all lawyers paid in this fashion? And doctors, for that matter. If the operation's a failure, why not let the doctor absorb the loss, eh? But such an arrangement will be a long time coming, I'm afraid. Yet I have found it workable in my practice."

"If you can get Clark acquitted—"

"Acquitted?" Ehrengraf rubbed his hands together. "Mrs. Culhane, in my most notable successes it is not even a question of acquittal. It is rather a matter of the case never even coming to trial. New evidence is discovered, the actual miscreant confesses or is brought to justice, and one way or another charges against my client are dropped. Courtroom pyrotechnics, wizardry in cross-examination—ah, I prefer to leave that to the Perry Masons of the world. It is not unfair to say, Mrs. Culhane, that I am more a detective than a lawyer. What is the saying? The best defense is a good offense. Or perhaps it is the other way around, the best offense is a good defense, but it hardly matters. It is also a saying in warfare and in chess, but neither serves as the ideal metaphor for what concerns us. And what does concern us, Mrs. Culhane"—he leaned toward her and his dark eyes flashed—"what concerns us is saving your son's life, securing his freedom, and preserving his reputation. Yes?"

"Yes. Yes, of course."

"The evidence against your son is substantial, Mrs. Culhane. The dead girl, Althea Patton, was his former fiancée. It is said she jilted him—"

"He broke the engagement."

"I don't doubt that for a moment, but the prosecution would have it otherwise. This Patton girl was strangled. Around her throat was found a necktie."

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Mrs. Culhane's eyes went involuntarily to the lawyer's own blue tie, then slipped away.

"A *particular* necktie, Mrs. Culhane. A necktie made exclusively for and worn exclusively by members of the Caedmon Society at Oxford University. Your son attended Dartmouth, Mrs. Culhane, and after graduation he spent a year in advanced study in England."

"Yes."

"At Oxford University."

"Yes."

"Where he became a member of the Caedmon Society."

"Yes."

Ehrengraf breathed in through clenched teeth. "He owned a necktie of the Caedmon Society. He appears to be the only member of the society residing in this city and would thus presumably be the only person to own such a tie. He cannot produce that tie, nor can he provide a satisfactory alibi for the night in question."

"Someone must have stolen his tie."

"The murderer, of course."

"To frame my son."

"Of course," Ehrengraf said soothingly. "There could be no other explanation, could there?" He breathed in, breathed out, then set his chin decisively. "I will undertake your son's defense," he announced. "And on my usual terms."

"Oh, thank heavens."

"My fee will be seventy-five thousand dollars. That is a great deal of money, Mrs. Culhane, although you might very well have ended up paying Mr. Farrell that much or more by the time you'd gone through the tortuous processes of trial and appeal and so on, and after he'd presented an itemized accounting of his expenses. My fee includes any and all expenses which I might incur. No matter how much time, effort, and money I spend on your son's behalf, the cost to you will be limited to the figure I named. And none of that will be payable unless your son is freed. Does that meet with your approval?"

She hardly had to hesitate but forced herself to take a moment before replying. "Yes," she said. "The terms are satisfactory."

"Another point. If, ten minutes from now, the District Attorney should decide of his own accord to drop all charges against your son, you nevertheless owe me seventy-five thousand dollars. Even

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though I should have done nothing to earn it."

"I don't see—"

The thin lips smiled. The dark eyes did not participate in the smile. "It is my policy, Mrs. Culhane. Most of my work, as I have said, is more the work of a detective than the work of a lawyer. I operate largely behind the scenes and in the shadows. Perhaps I set currents in motion, or build little fires. Often when the smoke clears it is hard to prove to what extent my client's victory is the fruit of my labor. Thus I do not attempt to prove anything of the sort. I merely share in the victory by collecting my fee in full whether I seem to have earned it or not. You understand? Completely?"

It did seem reasonable, even if the explanation was the slightest bit hazy. Perhaps the little man dabbled in bribery, perhaps he knew the right strings to pull but could scarcely disclose them after the fact. Well, it hardly mattered. All that mattered was Clark's freedom and good name.

"Yes," she said, "I understand. When Clark is released you'll be paid in full."

"Very good."

She frowned. "In the meantime you'll want a retainer, won't you? An advance of some sort?"

"You have a dollar?" She looked in her purse, drew out a dollar bill. "Give it to me, Mrs. Culhane. Very good. An advance of one dollar against a fee of seventy-five thousand dollars. And I assure you, my dear Mrs. Culhane, that should this case not resolve itself in unqualified success I shall even return this dollar to you." The smile again, and this time there was a twinkle in the eyes. "But that will not happen, Mrs. Culhane, because I do not intend to fail."

It was a little more than a month later when Dorothy Culhane made her second visit to Martin Ehrengraf's office. This time the little lawyer's suit was a navy-blue pinstripe, his necktie maroon with a subdued below-the-knot design. His starched white shirt might have been the same one she had seen on her first visit. The shoes, with black wing tips, were as highly polished as the earlier pair.

His expression was changed slightly. There was something that might have been sorrow in his deepset eyes, a look that suggested his continuing disappointment with human nature.

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"It would seem quite clear," Ehrengraf said now. "Your son has been released. All charges have been dropped. He is a free man, free even to the extent that no shadow of suspicion hangs over him in the public mind."

"Yes," Mrs. Culhane said, "and that's wonderful, and I couldn't be happier about it. Of course it's terrible about the girls, I hate to think that Clark's happiness and my own happiness stem from their tragedy, or I suppose it's tragedies, isn't it, but all the same I feel—"

"Mrs. Culhane."

She bit off her words, let her eyes meet his.

"Mrs. Culhane, it's quite cut and dried, isn't it? You owe me seventy-five thousand dollars."

"But—"

"We discussed this, Mrs. Culhane. I'm sure you recall our discussion. We went over the matter clearly and at length. On the successful resolution of this matter you were to pay me my fee—seventy-five thousand dollars. Less, of course, the sum of one dollar already paid to me as a retainer."

"But—"

"Even if I did nothing—that was our understanding. Even if the District Attorney elected to drop charges before you'd even departed from these premises. That was the example I gave you at the time."

"Yes."

"And you agreed to those terms."

"Yes, but—"

"But what, Mrs. Culhane?"

She took a deep breath, set herself bravely. "Three girls," she said. "Strangled, all three of them, just like Althea Patton. All the same physical type—slender blondes with high foreheads and prominent front teeth, two of them here in town and one across the river in Montclair, and around each of their throats—"

"A necktie."

"The same necktie."

"A necktie of the Caedmon Society of Oxford University."

"Yes." She drew another breath. "So it was obvious that there's a maniac at large," she went on, "and the last killing was in Montclair, so maybe he's leaving the area, and my God I hope so, it's terrifying, the idea of a man just killing girls at random because they remind him of his mother—"

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"I beg your pardon?"

"That's what somebody was saying on television last night. A psychiatrist. It was just a theory."

"Yes," Ehrengraf said. "Theories are interesting, aren't they? Speculation, guesswork, hypotheses, all very interesting."

"But the point is—"

"Yes?"

"I know what we agreed, Mr. Ehrengraf. But on the other hand you made only one visit to Clark in prison, just one brief visit, and then as far as I can see you did nothing at all, and just because the madman happened to strike again while my son was in prison and kill the other girls in exactly the same manner and even use the same kind of tie—well, you have to admit that seventy-five thousand dollars sounds like quite a windfall for you."

"Windfall?"

"So I was discussing this with my own attorney—he's not a criminal lawyer, he handles my personal affairs—and he suggested you might accept a reduced fee by way of settlement."

"He suggested this, eh?"

She avoided the man's eyes. "Yes, he did suggest it, and I must say it seems reasonable to me. Of course I would be glad to reimburse you for any expenses you incurred, although I can't honestly think you could have run up much in the way of expenses, and he suggested that I might give you a fee on top of that of five thousand dollars, but I *am* grateful, Mr. Ehrengraf, and I'd be willing to make that ten thousand dollars, and you have to admit that's not a trifle, don't you? I have money, I'm comfortably set up financially, but no one can afford to pay seventy-five thousand dollars for nothing at all, and—"

"Human beings," Ehrengraf said, and closed his eyes. "And the rich are the worst of all," he added, opening his eyes, fixing them on Dorothy Culhane. "It is an unfortunte fact of life that only the rich can afford to pay high fees. Thus I must make my living acting on their behalf. The poor, they do not agree to an arrangement when they are desperate and go back on their word when they are in more reassuring circumstances."

"It's not so much that I'm going back on my word," Mrs. Culhane said. "It's just that—"

"Mrs. Culhane."

"Yes?"

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"I am going to tell you something which I doubt will have any effect on you, but at least I shall have tried. The best thing you can do, right at this moment, would be to take out your checkbook and write out a check to me for payment in full. You will probably not do this, and you will ultimately regret it."

"Is that a—are you threatening me?"

A flicker of a smile. "Certainly not. I have given you not a threat but a prediction. You see, if you do not pay my fee, what I shall do is tell you something else which will lead you to pay me my fee after all."

"I don't understand."

"No," Martin Ehrengraf said. "No, I don't suppose you do. Mrs. Culhane, you spoke of expenses. You doubted I could have incurred significant expenses on your son's behalf. There are many things I could say, Mrs. Culhane, but I think it might be best for me to confine myself to a brisk accounting of a small portion of my expenses."

"I don't—"

"Please, my dear lady. If I were listing my expenses, I would begin by jotting down my train fare to New York City. Then taxi fare to John F. Kennedy Airport, which comes to twenty dollars with tip and bridge tolls—"

"Mr. Ehrengraf—"

"*Please*. Then airfare to London and back. I always fly first class—it's an indulgence, but since I pay my own expenses out of my own pocket I feel I have the right to indulge myself. Next a rental car hired from Heathrow Airport and driven to Oxford and back. The price of gasoline is high enough over here, Mrs. Culhane, but in England they call it petrol and charge the earth for it."

She stared at him. His hands were folded on top of his disorderly desk and he went on talking in the calmest possible voice and she felt her jaw dropping but could not seem to raise it back into place.

"In Oxford I had to visit five gentlemen's clothiers, Mrs. Culhane. One shop had no Caedmon Society cravats in stock at the moment. I purchased one necktie from each of the other shops. I felt it really wouldn't do to buy more than one tie in any one shop. A man prefers not to call attention to himself unnecessarily. The Caedmon Society necktie, Mrs. Culhane, is not unattractive. A navy-blue field with a half-inch stripe of royal blue and two

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narrower flanking stripes, one of gold, the other of a rather bright green. I don't care for regimental stripes myself, Mrs. Culhane, preferring as I do a more subdued style in neckwear, but the Caedmon tie is a handsome one all the same."

"My God."

"There were other expenses, Mrs. Culhane, but as I pay them myself I don't honestly think there's any need for me to recount them to you, do you?"

"My God. Dear God in heaven."

"Indeed. It would have been better all around, as I said a few moments ago, had you decided to pay my fee without hearing what you've just heard. Ignorance in this case would have been, if not bliss, at least a good deal closer to bliss than what you're undoubtedly feeling at the moment."

"Clark didn't kill that girl."

"Of course he didn't, Mrs. Culhane. I'm sure some rotter stole his tie and framed him. But that would have been an enormous chore to prove and all a lawyer could have done was to persuade a jury that there was room for doubt, and poor Clark would have had a cloud over him all the days of his life. Of course you and I know he's innocent—"

"He *is* innocent," she said.

"Of course, Mrs. Culhane. The killer was a homicidal maniac striking down young women who reminded him of his mother. Or his sister, or God knows whom. You'll want to get out your checkbook, Mrs. Culhane, but don't try to write the check just yet. Your hands are trembling. Just sit there, that's the ticket, and I'll get you a glass of water. Everything's perfectly fine, Mrs. Culhane. That's what you must remember. Everything's perfectly fine and everything will continue to be perfectly fine. Here you are, a couple of ounces of water in a paper cup, just drink it down, *there* you are."

And when it was time to write out the check her hand did not shake a bit. Pay to the order of Martin H. Ehrengraf, seventy-five thousand dollars, signed Dorothy Rodgers Culhane. Signed with a ballpoint pen, no need to blot it dry, and handed across the desk to the impeccably dressed little man.

"Yes, thank you, my dear lady. And here is your dollar, the retainer you gave me. Go ahead and take it, please."

She took the dollar.

"Very good. And you probably won't want to repeat this conver-

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sation to anyone. What would be the point?"

"No. No, I won't say anything."

"Of course not."

"Four neckties," she said. He raised his eyebrows a fraction of an inch. "You said you bought four of the neckties. There were only three girls killed."

"Indeed."

"What happened to the fourth necktie?"

"Why, it must be in my bureau drawer, I suppose. And perhaps all four neckties are in my bureau drawer, still in their original wrappings, and purchasing them was just a waste of time and money on my part. Perhaps that homicidal maniac had neckties of his own and the four in my drawer are just an interesting souvenir, a reminder of this case, of what might have been."

"Oh."

"And perhaps I've just told you a story out of the whole cloth, an interesting turn of phrase since we are speaking of silk neckties. Perhaps I never flew to London at all, never motored to Oxford, never purchased a single necktie of the Caedmon Society. Perhaps that was just something I trumped up on the spur of the moment to coax a fee out of you."

"But—"

"Ah, my dear lady," he said, moving to the side of her chair, taking her arm, helping her up out of the chair, turning her, steering her toward the door. "We would do well, Mrs. Culhane, to believe that which it most pleases us to believe. I have my fee. You have your son. The police have another line of inquiry to pursue. It would seem we've all come out of this well, wouldn't you say? Put your mind at rest, dear Mrs. Culhane. There's the elevator down the hall on your left. If you ever need my services you know where I am and how to reach me. And perhaps you'll recommend me to your friends. But discreetly, dear lady. Discretion is everything in matters of this sort."

She walked carefully down the hall to the elevator, rang the bell, and waited. And she did not look back. Not once.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 486th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The Master Detective, as seen from a wholly new and different point of view . . .

The author, Esther L. Nash, works for the Federal Government. Her "main hobby is reading mystery stories—it was A. Conan Doyle's THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES *and Sherlock Holmes that got me hooked at a tender age." How many of us—millions!—can say the same thing. In your Editor's case it was* THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES . . .

LETTERS FROM 221A BAKER STREET

by ESTHER L. NASH

AUTHOR'S NOTE

One of the most famous addresses in the world of literature is 221B Baker Street, the launching pad for many of the Sherlock Holmes adventures. Since the age of eleven when I became a Holmes fan, I wondered about the inhabitants of 221A Baker Street, an address implied by the B of Mrs. Hudson's boardinghouse.

Recently, while pursuing my favorite pastime of rummaging around second-hand bookstores, I came across a packet of yellowed letters. They were addressed to a Miss Lucy Thorndyke of Baltimore, Maryland, and were dated during the 1880's. The point of origin was London, England; the writer was a Miss Rose Thorndyke, apparently the cousin of the American Miss Thorndyke. You can imagine how excited I was to see a return address of "221A Baker St."

The writer spoke mainly of small events and the ladylike thoughts of a Victorian spinster. Some of the writing was illegi-

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ble, but most of what I could read I found most interesting—especially references to the lady's illustrious neighbors. In reproducing excerpts from these letters, I've eliminated much of the contents which dealt with family matters and comments which held no special interest for me.

Dear Lucy,

I finally got settled in my new lodgings in Baker St. The house is high-ceilinged and roomy, much like Grandfather's house in Chelsea—certainly big enough for my maid Maria and me. The rear-yard is much smaller than Grandfather's although adequate for a rose garden. The neighbours tend to mind their own business which is an admirable trait in one's neighbours. My closest neighbour is Mrs. Hudson with whom I have a nodding acquaintance over the back-yard fence. She is a pleasant woman who seems to have little time for idle chatter—quite unlike Mr. Pelham, the clerk at Allardyce's Butcher Shop on Marylebone Road. Indeed, Mr. Pelham was spilling over with information when I told him where to deliver the leg of mutton. He informed me that two very distinguished gentlemen resided next door in Mrs. Hudson's lodging house, two eligible gentlemen he let me know with a rather vulgar wink. His familiarity was insufferable. I lost no time in paying my account and leaving.

Having much time on my hands and no near-by friends, I find myself taking more than ordinary interest in my neighbours. I know, for instance, that one of the gentlemen is a doctor; the name plate on the door proclaims as much: John H. Watson, MD, to be exact.

To-day I was returning from a shopping trip on Oxford St. as the two gentlemen were leaving their house. The doctor (I identified him by his black medical bag) is rather stockily built and distinguished-looking. He has a friendly, kind face, quite fitting for a family doctor.

His companion is something else entirely. Tall and slender, he has stern, almost forbidding, although handsome, features. I almost shuddered when I passed him—his eyes seemed to look right through me.

Later I met Mrs. Hudson who was hanging clothes in her back-yard. I asked in as casual a way as possible what her

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boarder did for a living. She told me that Mr. Holmes is an accomplished gentleman with the violin, from which I assume he is a concert violinist.

This fog, this miserable fog, has kept me a prisoner for almost a week. It is so thick I dare not venture out. I finished my petit-point cushion covers and worked half-heartedly on a shawl for Aunt Letitia's birthday. From my window I can see forms passing by, more like ghosts than living people. I wander around the house, something like a ghost myself, with nothing to do. I spend hours at the front windows, peering through the curtains for a sign that I am not entirely isolated from humanity.

My life here on Baker St. is usually calm and uneventful and my visitors are few. Mr. Thomas Wellington, the solicitor (you remember him in connection with Grandfather's will), drops in occasionally for tea. He asks me to attend the theatre with him, but I always decline, my excuse being that I am still in mourning for Henry. Do you realize, Lucy, had Henry not fallen off that ridiculous sailboat two years ago, we would be getting married this June? Whenever I mention Henry, Mr. Wellington expresses his condolences. He is a perfect gentleman, but, I am sorry to say, rather dull.

Last night was the most frightful of my life. I had retired about nine o'clock when I was frightened out of my wits by the sound of gun shots. My bedroom shares one wall with 221B, and it was from beyond that wall the noise was coming. That darling picture of Cousin Eustace as a baby fell to the floor, the glass shattering into a thousand pieces. Maria came screaming into my room and we huddled together for five minutes until the shooting stopped, trying to imagine what dreadful scene was taking place on the other side of the wall.

Well, I never! I asked Mrs. Hudson what happened in her house last night and she smiled, rather indulgently I thought, and said that Mr. Holmes was target-practicing. Imagine that, target-practicing inside one's home! I would be more inclined to believe he was trying to get my attention in an unnecessarily violent way, however effective it may have been.

I retired last night with some uneasiness, after the fright of the night before. However, I need not have worried. Mr. Holmes was

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evidently in a far different mood. Perhaps he wished to apologize for his former thoughtlessness. I found that Mrs. Hudson's estimate of his musical ability was quite accurate. The violin music that came through the wall was lovely, especially my favorite piece, *Only a Rose*.

This morning as I was coming down Baker St., I met a swarm of street-urchins converging on 221B. My neighbours attract a wide variety of callers, ranging from ragamuffins to a mysterious masked gentleman in an expensive carriage; from ladies of the working class to the very fashionable. Evidently they are Dr. Watson's patients.

I do believe, Lucy, that Mr. Holmes is interested in me. Last night his concert consisted of various "Rose " melodies, including the lovely *Rose of Tralee*. We meet occasionally on the street, but he has yet to speak a word or even exchange a glance. He is evidently extremely shy with ladies which would account for his still being a bachelor. I must find some way, without being forward of course, to get Mr. Holmes to speak to me.

Your suggestion to "bedazzle" the gentleman, dear Lucy, resulted in my adopting a new hair-style, now quite the rage in London. It is bouffant with tendrils, which I think brings out my best features.

I set out this morning in my new blue brocaded dress, my new French parasol, and my new coiffure. As I was leaving the post-office I ran, literally, into Mr. Holmes. I managed to drop my parasol, which he handed to me with scarcely a word. I was disappointed, but perhaps he didn't recognise me.

Mr. Wellington came to tea yesterday, and the thought occurred to me that perhaps some competition was called for. I thereupon surprised Mr. Wellington by accepting his invitation to the theatre that evening. He called for me in a hansom, and luckily Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson were coming down the street as Mr. Wellington was helping me into the cab.

I don't know whether to feel pleased or not. My appearance with Mr. Wellington seems to have had an unexpected effect on Mr. Holmes. Mrs. Hudson informs me that he has gone abroad

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with the doctor. According to the landlady they left very abruptly with no explanation. It may be for the best—absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Lucy, I am simply devastated; but let me start at the beginning. For the first time since I moved to Baker St., Mrs. Hudson visited me. I could see when I opened the door that something dreadful had happened. Mrs. Hudson's eyes were red from weeping, and she looked quite distraught.

"I must talk to someone, Miss Thorndyke. I have received the most horrible news."

I led her to a chair in the parlour and sent Maria for tea. Mrs. Hudson could hardly speak at first.

"It's Mr. Holmes, Miss. I just received word that he has had an accident."

For a moment I could only stare at the poor woman.

"What happened?"

"He fell, Miss—he fell into a falls somewhere on the continent and was drowned." At this she began weeping.

She managed to tell me that Mr. Lestrade, a friend of Mr. Holmes, had brought word of Mr. Holmes's death. She was so upset that she didn't grasp all the details. Whether he was pushed, or he fell or jumped wasn't clear. What she did understand was the tragic fact that he was gone.

I sat and stared at Mrs. Hudson, unable to speak. There was the terrible possibility that—but no, I refuse to think of it.

Dr. Watson no longer lives next door. However, Mr. Holmes's brother has made arrangements to keep the rooms in their present condition—as a memorial, I suppose.

I am not myself these days. Mr. Wellington called, and over tea he chatted on and on about a new writer whose stories are appearing in the *Strand Magazine*—something to do with a detective. I could scarcely keep my mind on what he was saying; at any rate, I abhor sensational journalism.

The most remarkable thing has happened, and I don't know what to make of it. Maria informed me this morning that she saw Mr. Holmes enter the house next door, leaving a few minutes later. She is absolutely certain it was he. I saw Mrs. Hudson in the yard and asked her if it were true.

"I can't say, Miss. I am sworn to secrecy," she said, but her

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beaming countenance left no doubt in my mind.

So he is back in London. He did not die in the falls. I'm sure he has a perfectly logical explanation for his peculiar behaviour.

A short while after dark, it being a fine night, I decided to go for a brisk walk before retiring. On my return I noticed a light in Mr. Holmes's room and his shadow on the blind—there was no mistaking his profile. I recalled that Maria had baked some Scottish scones that morning that would, I thought, make a proper welcome-home present.

A few minutes later, with a pan of scones in my hand, I was passing beneath Mr. Holmes's window when suddenly there was a plop and a tinkling sound. I was surprised to see bits of glass sprinkled over the scones. I glanced up to see the shattered window and Mr. Holmes's profile was no longer in view. Before I could collect my wits, three men emerged from the empty house across the street. I saw by the street lamp that they were Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, and a strange gentleman. Dr. Watson had a firm grip on the stranger's arm.

As they passed the street and neared the kerb, the stranger suddenly broke loose from the doctor's grasp, and in his haste brushed against me, sending me sprawling to the sidewalk, and fled up the street. Instantly men seemed to swarm from every doorway and alley. There was a great deal of shouting and running.

As no one seemed to notice my predicament, I picked myself up. A heel had come off my shoe, my skirt was torn, and a strand of hair had come loose and was hanging over my face.

Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson had been standing at the kerb watching the commotion—now they turned towards me.

"Mr. Holmes," I said, "perhaps you'd care to explain."

He turned those cool aloof eyes on me.

"And who, Madam, are you?"

I was speechless. That arrogant head with its air of masculine superiority was a tempting target in the gas-light. The now-empty scone pan in my hand was an ideal weapon. As I turned and limped towards my door, I heard Dr. Watson say, "My word, Holmes, what was that all about?"

And the crisp cold tones of Mr. Holmes replied, "I assure you, Watson, I haven't the least idea."

That is all that happened that night except I had an hysterical

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half-hour while Maria was putting damp cloths on my face. The next morning I decided I needed a change of scenery, perhaps a trip abroad. I shall call upon my solicitor to-morrow to make the necessary arrangements.

Lucy, dear, you will be happy to learn that Mr. Wellington and I are getting married. I think it was largely owing to Mr. Holmes's boorish conduct that the sterling qualities of Mr. Wellington were made apparent to me.

Your affectionate cousin,
Rose

AUTHOR'S COMMENTS

To even a casual reader of Sherlock Holmes, it is quite unnecessary to point out Miss Thorndyke's references to the Baker Street Irregulars, whom she dismisses as street urchins, to the King of Bohemia, and to the incident in which Holmes inscribed the Queen's initials on his wall with his pistol.

One can almost become annoyed with Miss Thorndyke. Here she had a ringside seat at the attempted assassination of Holmes and the capture of Colonel Sebastian Moran, and she couldn't have cared less. All in all, I think she and the dull Mr. Wellington deserve each other.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 487th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and one of the most appealing stories submitted by a teenager in some time . . . Here is the letter we received with young Yancey Davidson's first story:

"Dear Mr. Queen: I wrote this story for my creative writing teacher when she asked us to write a story in the first person about the adventures of a piece of money [the theme was probably suggested by a well-known story by O. Henry]. I got an A on the paper and after recopying it and correcting previous mistakes I decided to send it to EQMM . . . This is the fourth story I have sent you, none of the others were published, and I hope you will like it. I have never had any of my works published . . .As for myself, I am a student at Southern Huntingdon County [Pennsylvania] High School . . . I enjoy horseback riding, biking, and taking long walks with my dog. I also like to raise mice and parakeets, though I have none now; and to crochet and make latch hook rugs."

THE LIFE OF A FAKE

by YANCEY DAVIDSON

I was born one night in a small room in a seedy motel. I'm a counterfeit $20 bill.

My maker and first owner didn't keep me for long. First he put me in a stack of other bogus twenties and tied us together with a piece of string; he was very neat. Then he put my brick of money in an open suitcase with many other bricks of bogus twenties. In a few minutes a quick tapping sounded at the door of our room. My owner hurried to the door and let in a medium-tall, extremely ugly, dark-complexioned woman.

The dark ugly woman was carrying a suitcase exactly like the

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one I was in. She put down her suitcase and waddled over to look at me. (No, I'm not that vain, she was looking at all of us.) She picked up a stack next to mine and flipped through it.

My owner asked, "Are they all right?" He seemed nervous.

The dark ugly woman grunted, nodded, and abruptly shut the lid. I heard her say, in a muffled tone, "Yours is in there." I guess she meant the other case. Then she picked up my suitcase and left the room. (I knew she had picked up my dark cramped prison by the way it shook as she waddled; she was not only dark and ugly, she was also plump.)

We hadn't gone far when I heard brakes squeal and a gun explode from close quarters. The suitcase I was in hit the ground and bounced. Almost as soon as it landed again, it was scooped up. Some unknown person ran several steps with the suitcase and then dived into the back seat of a car. The car spun its wheels as it left the scene.

After a long fast ride my shaken companions and I were hurried into a building and taken into what appeared to me to be someone's office and placed on a desk. I saw this after they opened the lid.

"Here it is, boss," announced a triumphant young voice from behind me.

The "boss" was a middle-aged, slim, and weathered man. Because I was sitting on his desk facing him I had a good view of him. However, he could also take a good look at me—at all of us, I mean. As he looked he began to frown. He picked up a brick of bills. His frown deepened.

"What's wrong, sir?" asked the young voice, now not so triumphant.

The boss said in a soft tone, "The money is fake, Ferdie."

The young voice which must have belonged to Ferdie made a strangled sound.

"No, Ferdie," said the soft-voiced boss. "I give everyone a chance to make one mistake without penalizing him. So if you act quickly and rectify your mistake, there will be no punishment. This is also because you could not be expected to know the money was counterfeit."

"Thank you, sir," said Ferdie.

"Go and clean up your mess, then thank me. Chip, you go with him. And take this with you," said the boss, closing the lid of the suitcase over me. "Get rid of it. And don't make another mistake."

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Then I was taken out of the office and carried down a hallway. I heard Ferdie say to someone, "Here, take this and get rid of it."

"Any particular way you want it done, Ferdie?" asked the someone.

"No. Throw it off a bridge or burn it—I don't care. Just get rid of it. Don't spend any of what's in there, it's all fake."

He handed my crowded prison to the underling and hurried away. The underling followed Ferdie at a more stately pace. He took us outside to another car and drove around with us for a long, long time. Finally he stopped, picked up the suitcase again, and carried it for a short distance. Then he dropped us, my comrades and I, over the side of a bridge.

The drop was terrifying, but we all preferred the water to being burned. It was fortunate for us that the suitcase did not fall into the water. It landed on the beach, out of the reach of even the largest wave.

That was where the junkie found us in the morning when he was going to meet his pusher. He was very pleased with us.

I'm still in the suitcase, but it is now in his tent, and he takes some of my brothers out of it before he leaves each morning. (Did you know that we are all called either Buck or Bill?) If he does not O.D. or get caught, it will soon be my turn to venture into the world again.

I know that I will be picked out someday and destroyed, but, as my junkie tells his girl friend, if it is to be a short life it may as well be a merry one. I'm not going to worry about it anyway.

"Q"

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Gash, Jonathan	THE JUDAS PAIR	Harper & Row	$8.95	12/14

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 488th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an offbeat tale of counterespionage by a new writer with an unusual manner of telling a story . . .

The author, John Briggs, has "graduate degrees in English Literature," and is currently working in the Office of Admissions of Bloomsburg State College in Pennsylvania. He is thirty years old, single, and "a tennis and bridge nut." During his service years in the late sixties and early seventies he "was trained in Military Intelligence"—which explains his theme and perhaps his approach to the telling of it . . .

SMITH AND CARP

by JOHN BRIGGS

I'm Smith, he's Carpiano; I'm Harvard, he's Brooklyn; I'm the plodder, he's the instinctive genius. We work in Washington, for a department you know nothing about (I hope—I haven't checked the newspapers lately). Right now we are busy basking in the sunlight of earned praise. We look good. We look like two geniuses instead of one genius and one humble plodder. Here's how:

For three months, plod, plod, plod, while the Italian Einstein lazes happily through the days and weeks, see no plod, hear no plod, and absolutely do no plod. It gets boring: work, work, work, scream at Carp to do something; plod, plod, plod, scream at Carp to do something.

One day we buy somebody on the inside (I cleverly give him the code name "Somebody"). I buy Somebody, a rat if ever there was one, because Carp's big contribution so far is "Looks like a toughie, pal." What's nice about Somebody is that he works for Hilliard's little puzzle magazine, which is not a little puzzle magazine at all.

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It is the puzzle-lover's magazine, just as Hilliard is one of the puzzle-and-code experts. In each issue is what Hilliard labels "The Editor's Torture Chamber," a very special code puzzle. Special because nobody solves them and special because everything indicates that the Torture Chamber puzzle is what Hilliard uses to pass the most expensive diplomatic, economic, and military information now on the market. To bring him in we have to break the puzzles. It does not help when we learn that Hilliard, very legally, is getting set to leave the country.

My rented fink, Somebody, shocks me no end; he does what he is getting paid for. He confirms that it is, indeed, the special puzzles, as we figured. Our boss tells us to concentrate completely on the puzzles, a big help. We get experts, the kind who will give it a try on behalf of patriotism. But the thing is, only Hilliard is the master of those puzzles, and until we solve one and learn the key, he can sit back and laugh. The days are wearing on and Hilliard's departure time is closing fast. Are we under any pressure from above? Nooooo, of course not.

One day Carp suggests that, since we are not exactly tearing Hilliard limb from limb intellectually, why not harass him a little, huh? The boss replies that if we even touch Hilliard before we have the whole thing cinched, we will spend the next two years infiltrating suspicious penguin colonies at the South Pole.

Carp is so shaken by this that he comes to work the next day at 9:30 instead of his usual 10:30. I open his door an hour later and he is playing solitaire. To relax his mind, he says. To help things along, our experts are proof of what you get for free; but at least they are working hard—more than Carp is doing.

We have great computers. They will save us—right? Wrong. A computer can play perfect chess when someone tells it the basic moves and rules. If we knew the moves and rules for this game, we'd solve the damn puzzles ourselves! Anyway, Carp hates computers.

EEEEEEYAHHHHH! I am going crazy on sixteen-hour days. Our whole section is now assigned to us, not to mention the computers and our "experts." Behind his closed door Carp is studying Arabic (which shows how smart he really is—when I'm out on the streets, looking for work, he'll be working for an oil company making a bundle). If I had time I'd plot a perfect murder—of Carp.

Then we do something right. We get another expert, one who

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does not understand the word "free." *The* expert for *the* puzzles. He is a cinch. We know that because he tells us so. When the boss sees the in-advance bill, he tells us not to worry about the South Pole; if he signs this voucher, he's going with us. He signs the voucher. (The boss should have been on the stage.)

We get good news and bad news. First, Somebody tells us that our new expert has Hilliard scared. That's good. The bad news is "What do you mean he knows about our expert?" Only four people know and three of us are very, very trustworthy. Carp, it turns out, also hates big-mouthed experts who brag about how their country needs them.

But we must be doing okay. Otherwise, why would Hilliard be nervous? Then Somebody tells us that Hilliard has brought in an expert of his own. What does he do? Our Somebody doesn't know. But we are not worried because our expert is *the* expert. He is soooo confident. "If I can't solve it in another twenty-four hours, then it can't be solved at all, and that's final," he says. Wonderful, wonderful, we answer, because Hilliard is leaving in three days. No problem for our expert, who takes the puzzles to his special "think" lab where, he tells us, his concentration is "huge."

So we are in, right? Right. Unless something happens to our expert, he will solve . . ."Oh, oh, my," says Carp, "I think I know what their expert does." Hotfoot it to our expert's lab. Nothing there. Nothing at all. No lab, no expert, just rubble. The bomb boys help out a lot. "Professional job," they say. Thanks, guys.

On the way back Carp has good news. He knows a place where we can get great thermal underwear. Here we come, penguins, ready or not. What does a seditious penguin look like, anyway?

Back at the office we learn that our expert survived and has been taken to the hospital. He can work in three months, no less.

Carp comes up with one of his gems. "Let's go see Hilliard," he says. At first I am not too impressed. But then it occurs to me that after all I have to get Somebody out of there because he has done his work and, besides, I promised (it's morally right to keep your word, even to a rat like Somebody; plus, among rats, if word doesn't get around that you have proved trustworthy, no more rats).

We go to see Hilliard. Nice mansion you have here. He serves us better-than-good Scotch and we enter into a little play on words in which he tells us we are dumb. Then he says that he

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really shouldn't be joking and laughing because a terrible thing has just happended; a gasoline explosion, somebody who works for him.

"Oh, oh," whispers Carp, "I think I remember what their expert does." I wonder how the international brotherhood of rats will take the loss of their beloved Somebody?

"This is my friend and associate, Mr. Jones," Hilliard says, "one of the many experts we employ. Photography, you know. He does blowups."

"Hiya, pal, a real pleasure," their expert says as he laughs and reaches out to shake hands. Such awful habits Carp retains from his Brooklyn days.

"What do you think this is?" Carp asks with a big smile, "amateur night?" He pulls the expert a bit off balance and kicks hard. The tip of his shoe takes the expert right on the shin. "Ahh-*AHHHHH*!" screams our bomb-happy friend. It looks like a broken shin. Hilliard takes a quick look at him and then motions some fourth stringers to carry him off.

"Really, you've no idea how you've helped my budget," Hilliard finally says. "Now I won't even have to pay him to kill you."

We are on our way out when Hilliard stops us. "I regret what I said," he explains. "You two are utterly harmless and therefore killing you is unnecessary. And, gentlemen, I never do the unnecessary. I never make that mistake. Never. You are safe. Go and give thanks. Good day."

We are walking toward the car—make that I am walking toward the car alone. Carp has stopped and he has *that* look on his face.

"You know," he says. "I never had that modern math, but can one and one ever add up to a hundred and thirteen?"

We race back, Carp thinking like crazy, but spitting out only half of it, which is killing me because he thinks he's got it ("I think I got it, I think I got it," is all I can make sense of). Carp hires more experts, invites the freebies back, and buys more computer time with the department's money. "The magazine, go over the magazine from front to back, everything *except* the puzzle," he orders. He even howls at the boss who has come down to brief us on Antarctica since we have only two days left before Hilliard heads for sunny somewhere else.

Twenty hours and three near heart attacks among the computer boys later, one of our freebie experts says, "My, my, isn't this an

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interesting pattern, this one on page eleven that keeps coming up again and again." So far we have put maybe 800 potential patterns into the computers. We flash this one on the print too.

The boss goes foamy. *"STOP THAT COMPUTER!"* he's screaming. *"THAT'S CLASSIFIED INFORMATION!"* I had a quick look at the first two lines of the printout. You better believe that's classified information.

An hour later the boss takes a group of people who are very much into violence and surrounds the mansion. Hilliard comes out and offers the boss some outstanding Scotch. The boss, who has that great sense of the dramatic, reads Hilliard the last message we decoded. Hilliard drops the whole bottle of Scotch and, the way Carp sees it, that's as good as a confession, right?

When they are taking Hilliard away, Carp reminds the boss of the expert with the broken shin, that fellow, the one trying to get away, over there. The expert is a lot faster with his mind than he is on a broken leg. Let's-make-a-deal time, and it turns out that the expert knows enough to latch the door forever.

Carp explains to the happy, happy boss how terribly hard this case has been and how we desperately need some rest, and the boss buys it.

"Okay, Carp," I say as we are about to leave for a lovely island without any direct lines back to Washington (well, maybe one line, with a really weak ring), an island where we can bask in the sun and search out interesting companions, "what did we do that was brilliant?" (I did all the work and, by George, I want half of the credit.)

"It was you," he says, "you brought in Somebody and you hired our greedy, bragging expert."

"A magnificent intellectual achievement on my part. The greedy expert almost got himself killed and let's not talk about Somebody."

"But Hilliard talked about him," Carp said, "when he told us that he never did anything unnecessary. That meant it *had* been necessary to kill Somebody. But why? Our Somebody had already done all the damage he could by confirming that the messages were in the main puzzles. He couldn't possibly have learned anything new. Except for one thing. He could have learned that he had been wrong, that the messages weren't in the puzzles at all."

"That's pretty shaky," I said. An awful thought came to me. "Carp," I asked, "we didn't by any chance just luck out, did we?"

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"Nope. At first I thought we'd have to, but while we were driving back I managed to fit our money-hungry expert in. You see, Hilliard didn't fear any expert, really; he let all the others go unharmed. So what was different about our new expert? Was he that much better? No, he wasn't. I suspect he couldn't have solved those puzzles any better than the people who worked for free. But he had that big ego and when he couldn't solve the puzzle he would have tried again.

"When he failed the second time, he would have come out and told us *there was no puzzle*, that since *he* couldn't solve it, it must be a fake. I'd have kicked him in the butt and sent him back in, but you, you're a believer in hard work, and sooner or later you'd have given his theory a go because you don't leave anything untried. So, from Hilliard's point of view, our expert was dangerous to him—not because he could solve the puzzles, but because he couldn't. I find that very, very funny."

I thought about it for a while. I found it funny too, because, you see, Carp was wrong. By the time we were walking out of Hilliard's house, I had already figured that hard work hadn't won fair maiden and so I had silently resolved to give up and trust in Carp. If Carp's instincts had told him to beat up on the money-grubbing expert until the expert went back in, I'd have let him! We'd never have solved it. We'd have ended up listening to a lecture from a penguin expert instead of buying suntan lotion.

"You know, Carp," I said as the thought of minus 80-degree temperatures and howling freezing winds enveloped my mind, "we are really good at this."

"Yes," he said, "we are."

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a *NEW* Inspector Dover novelet by

JOYCE PORTER

Which detective of fiction is rude, mean, nasty, ungracious, and unpleasant, always grunting, growling, grumbling, snarling, yelping, screaming, bullying, scowling, and roaring? Only one—Chief Inspector Dover of Scotland Yard, admittedly not a fair or typical representative of that noble body . . . Well, Dover and his long-suffering Sergeant MacGregor are back at work, investigating the murder of a County Councillor found strangled in—where else for Dover?—a bathroom . . .

DOVER GOES TO SCHOOL

by JOYCE PORTER

Detective Chief Inspector Dover was a creature of habit. Whenever he entered a room he made a point of selecting the most comfortable-looking seat and heading straight for it. On this occasion, as he waddled across the threshold of the large old-fashioned bathroom at Skelmers Hall College, he was not embarrassed by choice. The rim of the bath was definitely out and he didn't fancy the three-legged stool. That left only one place where 241 pounds of flab could be safely deposited, and the Chief Inspector sank gratefully onto the oval of polished mahogany. That flight of stairs up from the ground floor had taken it out of him.

Two other men entered the bathroom. One was the young and handsome Detective Sergeant MacGregor, Chief Inspector Dover's long-suffering assistant; the other was an older man in uniform, Inspector Howard. He was the representative of the local police force whose unenviable job it was to put these two clever devils from Scotland Yard in the picture.

It was Inspector Howard's first encounter with members of the prestigious Murder Squad and he was understandably somewhat diffident. Still, a man had to do what a man had to do. He cleared his throat. "Er—excuse me, sir."

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Dover's mean little eyes opened slowly and balefully. "What?"

"Your—er—feet, sir."

"What about 'em?"

"They're resting on the—er—body, sir."

Dover glanced down and with ill grace shifted his boots back a couple of inches from the corpse that lay sprawled, in pajamas and dressing gown, over the bathroom floor. "Thought you were supposed to be telling us what's happened," he observed nastily.

Inspector Howard swallowed. "Oh, yes, I am, sir."

"Well, get on with it, then! I don't want to sit here all morning gawping at a stiff!" Dover's pasty face twisted in a grimace.

Not surprisingly, Inspector Howard's account of the murder which had taken place in the bathroom at Skelmers Hall College was somewhat incoherent. Shorn of his stammerings and splutterings, and expurgated of Dover's increasingly obscene interjections, the story ran something like this:

Skelmers Hall College was an Adult Education Centre where members of the general public could attend courses on subjects of interest to them. The course which had been planned for that weekend was on icons and half a dozen enthusiasts had assembled just before supper on the previous evening, Friday. After supper they had been treated to an introductory lecture by the visiting expert, Professor Ross, and had then dispersed to their various bedrooms for the night. It was in the early hours of Saturday morning that one of the students, a young woman named Wenda Birkinshaw, had discovered the body.

"What's his name?" asked Dover, giving the corpse a poke with his boot.

"Er—Rupert Andrews, sir. Quite a well-known building contractor, I understand, and a County Councillor too."

"How was he croaked?"

"Ah, now that's rather interesting, sir." Inspector Howard's boyish enthusiasm didn't find much echo in his audience. "He was knocked unconscious, then strangled with the cord of his own dressing gown. This was proably one of the weapons, sir."

"This" proved to be a sausage-shaped object, about two feet long, still lying where it had been found on the floor by the washbasin.

Dover inspected it from a safe distance. "What the hell is it?"

"It's a draft excluder, sir. Mrs. Crocker, the Warden's wife, made it herself. It's just a tube of cloth some three inches in

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diameter filled with sand. You stretch it out along the window sill to keep the draft out. There are several more of them about the Hall. These old houses generally seem to have badly fitting windows, don't they? This particular draft excluder weighs several pounds, sir, and would make a highly efficient cosh. It belongs here in the bathroom."

Dover had slumped back until his spine rested comfortably against the wall. "You always this bloody long-winded?" he asked unpleasantly. "Or is it just for my benefit? And don't," he added as poor Inspector Howard produced yet another prize exhibit, "bother telling me what that is because I know. It's a bath brush."

"It's another murder weapon, sir," explained Inspector Howard. He glanced for sympathy at Sergeant MacGregor, but that young gentleman was prudently keeping his head well down over his notebook. "The handle of the bath brush, sir, was inserted into the dressing-gown cord and used like a tourniquet to tighten it round the neck of the unconscious victim. The victim was a middle-aged man, sir, but quite strong. In the doctor's opinion quite a frail person could have killed him using this method."

"When I want the bloody doctor's opinion," grunted Dover who really worked at being ungracious, "I'll ask for it. Anything else?"

"I don't think so, sir," replied Inspector Howard miserably.

"What about bloody suspects?"

"Oh, yes, well, virtually everybody in the house last night is a suspect, sir." Inspector Howard shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Things weren't going at all as he'd expected. Where was that friendly cooperation between one copper and another? That professional camaraderie— That happy exchange of— He caught Dover's jaundiced eye and hurriedly took up the thread of his story. "The Hall is securely locked up at night, sir, and there's no sign of a break-in. Of course we can't definitely exclude—"

"Let's have a few names," growled Dover.

"Of the suspects, sir?"

Dover rolled his eyes toward the ceiling.

"Well, there's Brigadier and Mrs. Crocker, sir, the resident Wardens of the College, and—"

"Here," said Dover as the thought suddenly struck him, "do you have to pay to come to this dump?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Not very much, though. The students' fees, I understand, only cover part of the cost of running the place. The rest comes from the government."

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"Bully for some!" grumbled Dover. "Well, get on with it!"

There were, it turned out, no less than eight possible murderers currently at the Skelmers Hall College for Adult Education—and Chief Inspector Dover's face fell at the news. Apart from the Crockers, they were in alphabetical order: Miss Wenda Birkinshaw (who had discovered the body), Miss Betsy Gallop, Mr. and Mrs. Mappin, Professor Ross (the lecturer), and Peter Thorrowgood.

Somewhat to everyone's surprise, Dover had actually been listening. "No Mrs. Anfield?" he demanded indignantly.

"Anfield, sir?"

Sergeant MacGregor was more accustomed to the great man's idiosyncracies. "I think you mean Andrews, sir," he said, looking up from his notebook. "The dead man was named Andrews."

"What I said!" snarled Dover before turning again on the shrinking Inspector Howard. "So where's his wife?"

Inspector Howard gave up trying to understand. "I gather he was divorced, sir."

"Pity," said Dover, sinking back into lethargy.

"Sir?"

In an untypical flush of generosity Dover tossed one pearl of his investigatory wisdom to this poor provincial bluebottle. "If Mrs. Ashford had been on the scene, laddie, we could just have arrested her and all gone home." He sensed that Inspector Howard needed something more. "Husbands, laddie," he added, disgruntled at having thus to gild the lily, "are always murdered by their wives. And vice versa."

Inspector Howard, to his eternal credit, took his courage in both hands. "Always, sir?"

"Near as damn it!" grunted Dover, hauling himself to his feet and stepping clumsily over the dead body. "It's a law of nature." He headed for the door. "If anybody wants me I'll be downstairs." As he passed MacGregor he fired off a valedictory behest in a voice that carried just far enough to do the most damage. "And get rid of *him*!"

Whether it was Dover's sensitive ears that had caught the clink of bottles or his delicate nostrils that had picked up the aroma of good malt whiskey at 150 paces, the world will never know. Suffice it to say that he made his way unerringly downstairs and straight into the small parlor that served Skelmers Hall College as a bar just as Brigadier Crocker raised his tumbler to his lips.

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Caught red-handed, there was nothing a retired officer-and-gentleman could do but reach for another glass. The Brigadier introduced himself. "You look," he said, erroneously attributing Dover's habitual pallor to shock, "as though you could do with this."

"It wasn't a pretty sight," agreed Dover, reaching out an eager paw.

The Brigadier proposed a toast. "Absent friends!"

Dover emptied his glass and prudently got a refill before putting the boot in. "Pal of yours, was he?"

The Brigadier's indignation nearly sobered him. "Good lord, no! I never set eyes on the bounder before last night."

"Bounder?" queried Dover, who liked seeing people squirm.

"Well, what would you call a chappie of fifty who attends a weekend study course on icons accompanied by his teenage popsie?"

Dover mulled it over. "You sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Him and Miss Birkinshaw—well, you only had to see them together to realize precisely what was going on."

Dover slowly examined his surroundings. "Bloody funny setup for a romantic weekend," he commented.

"It's a jolly sight cheaper than a hotel," the Brigadier pointed out, replenishing the drinks with an unsteady hand. "And he'd be less likely to run into any of his business chums. County Councillor, indeed!" He stared sullenly into the depths of his glass. "I should have a good look at Miss Birkinshaw, if I were you, Chief Inspector. She found Andrews, you know, and in my opinion—"

There might have been further revelations if it hadn't been for the arrival of a very tall, very thin man who moved with the preternatural leisureliness of a giraffe.

"Ah, Professor Ross!" Brigadier Crocker accompanied his greeting with legerdemain which had the bottle of whiskey out of sight before you could say "usquebaugh."

"I simply want to know how much longer I'm supposed to keep on," bleated Professor Ross. "I've just finished my lecture on Iconography, Part One, but it's hard going. They're hardly a very receptive audience."

"Business-as-usual was my idea," the Brigadier told Dover proudly. "Takes their minds off the tragedy, keeps 'em out of your hair, *and* stops 'em asking for their money back." He addressed Professor Ross again. "What are they doing now?"

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"Having their coffee break," whined the Professor. "That's what's on the timetable."

The Brigadier emerged reluctantly from behind his bar. "I'd better go and give the lady wife a hand before she starts feeling put upon, what? I'll bring you your coffee back here."

Left alone, Dover and the Professor eyed each other moodily. In the end it was Dover, his tongue no doubt loosened by the strong drink, who cracked first.

"You don't look like a professor to me," he said, just to be rude.

Professor Ross's face turned scarlet. "Well, actually," he admitted hoarsely, "I'm not, really."

Dover leered in evil encouragement.

"No," confessed the unfortunate academic with an agonized grimace. "It's just that people have got into the habit of calling me one."

Dover removed his bowler hat the better to scratch at his head. "And you didn't stop 'em?"

Professor Ross (as we may as well continue to call him) murmured, "Well . . ."

"Here," yelped Dover, almost overwhelmed by the audacity of his imagination, "did Ainsworth know about this?"

"Ainsworth?"

"The dead man!" screamed Dover. "Did he know you were sailing under borrowed plumes?"

"Good heavens, no!" wailed the Professor. "The loud-mouthed bully was unpleasant enough to me without that! Oh, *dear*!" Too late—far, far too late—Professor Ross clamped a restraining hand over his mouth.

The only thing left in life that gave Dover real pleasure was bullying the weak and helpless. Naturally he preferred pushing widows and orphans around but, failing them, Professor Ross would do. It wasn't long before the whole story poured out.

It had happened during Professor Ross' introductory lecture, given on the previous evening immediately after supper. Professor Ross had been guilty of a couple of slips of the tongue and Councillor Andrews had pounced on them with unconcealed relish. Professor Ross realized with dismay that he'd encountered every lecturer's nightmare—an expert in the audience. And there were eight more sessions to get through!

"I *knew*," whimpered Professor Ross, "that I was showing them a Hodegetria Mother of God, and I can't think *why* I called it

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Glykophilusa. It was just a momentary mental aberration."

Dover grunted. It was all Greek to him.

"And then, when I was talking about the metal covers, he pulled me up again. I was simply trying to keep things simple. I know there's a *technical* difference between a riza and an oklad, but really the terms are—"

Dover's threshold of boredom could be measured in microns, so it was fortunate that the Brigadier chose this moment to return with coffee and biscuits. Mrs. Crocker came bustling in behind him. She was one of those women who are always busy.

"You forgot the sugar, Tom." The empty whiskey glasses on the bar counter caught her eye and her routine wifely exasperation turned to real fury. "Oh, for God's sake, you've not been at the booze already, have you?"

Her husband grinned sheepishly at his male companions. "Just a quick snifter to speed poor old Andrews on his way, m'dear."

If this reference to the dear departed was an attempt to inhibit Mrs. Crocker's wrath, it failed. "Poor old Andrews?" she repeated incredulously. "That's not what you called him last night, my lad. Last night you couldn't find words bad enough for him. I don't know when I've seen you in such a blind temper."

She was so absorbed in rinsing out glasses and wiping the bar top down that she failed to notice her husband's frantic signals, and went blithely on, "I'm surprised you need reminding, Tom, that 'poor old Andrews' is the same bloody interfering swine who was going to get us both turned out into the streets without a penny to our name."

Brigadier Crocker glanced at Dover to see if he was paying any attention to this tirade. Strangely enough, he was. "Nonsense, old girl," said the Brigadier desperately. "Andrews hadn't that much influence. He wasn't God Almighty, y'know."

"He was chairman of that special committee the Council set up for slashing local government expenditures," snapped Mrs. Crocker, draping her towel over the beer pump. "And he's not the only one who thinks Skelmers Hall College is a waste of public funds. He just happens to be the most influential and dangerous one we've come across to date."

The arrival of MacGregor to announce that the body had been removed interrupted this heated exchange of views.

Dover hoisted himself to his feet. "About bloody time!"

"They'll let us have the post-mortem report as soon as possible,

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sir," said MacGregor as he followed Dover upstairs. "And then I was wondering if you'd like to examine Andrews' room now, sir. He only brought one small suitcase, of course, but—"

Dover marched straight into the bathroom and locked the door firmly behind him.

When he emerged five minutes later, he was not pleased to find Professor Ross waiting for him on the landing. The Professor jerked into life and caught Dover by the sleeve. "Remember the old adage," he advised hoarsely. *"Cherchez la femme!"*

Dover tried to brush him off but the Professor was tenacious.

"It's the fair sex you ought to be looking at, Chief Inspector. That Mappin woman for a start."

Dover progressed, carrying Professor Ross with him as he went. "And who's she when she's at home?"

Having twined himself right round Dover, Professor Ross was now able to whisper confidentially in his ear. "She's a student of the course. With her husband. Not that that's cramping her style. They arrived early last night, like Councillor Andrews. You should have seen the pair of them in the bar—Mrs. Mappin and Andrews. Getting on like a house on fire! Flirting. Making suggestive remarks. Saying things with double meanings."

"What was her husband doing?" asked Dover, trying without success to break Professor Ross's wrist.

"Oh, he was maintaining a very low profile. Most of the time he wasn't even there. No doubt he's used to it, but if it had been my wife carrying on like—"

"I'll bear it in mind," promised Dover. "Jealous husband."

"No, no," moaned Professor Ross frantically. "The *wife*, not the husband."

Dover was trying to use his feet. "Eh?"

"*Mrs.* Mappin!" said the Professor. "Don't you understand? She thought she'd made a conquest. But she hadn't. He was just passing the time until Miss Birkinshaw turned up."

Something stirred in Dover's subconscious. "The girl who found the body?"

"That's right. She arrived just before supper and the minute she arrived on the scene Andrews dropped La Mappin like a hot potato."

"Hmm," said Dover.

Professor Ross was an experienced teacher and he knew that you couldn't repeat a thing too often for some people. "Hell," he

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announced, "hath no fury like a woman scorned."

MacGregor looked round as Dover burst into the bedroom and slammed the door shut behind him.

"Find anything, laddie?"

"Nothing of any significance, I'm afraid, sir."

"No cigarettes?"

"Andrews was a nonsmoker, sir."

"Trust him!" Dover's bottom lip protruded. "You sure you haven't got any, laddie?"

"You smoked all mine on the way down, sir."

Dover crossed over to the bed and flopped down on it sulkily. "You could have brought some more," he pointed out. "And what's that you're holding?"

"It's a tie, sir."

"I can see that!" snarled Dover before sinking back and closing his eyes.

MacGregor gazed nostalgically at the dazzling blue-and-silver stripes. "Councillor Andrews must have been a Butcher's Boy, sir."

"Eh?" Unlike his sergeant, Dover had not had the advantage of a Public School education, and further elucidation was required.

"Oh, that's what we used to call the chaps who went to Bullock's College, sir," said MacGregor. "Bullock, you see, sir—and the blue-and-white stripes. Like a butcher's apron."

"So what?"

"Well, so nothing, actually, sir." MacGregor draped the tie back over the mirror. "Just that we used to play them at cricket and rugger. Annual events, you know." MacGregor chuckled softly to himself. "We usually beat 'em too!"

Dover wallowed luxuriously among the pillows. "Are you claiming you knew this Ambrose, laddie?"

"Andrews, sir." MacGregor made the correction without much hope. "No, he'd be years before my time."

"Pity," grunted Dover. "I was hoping we'd be able to chuck our hands in, seeing as how you were personally involved with the deceased."

MacGregor had given up counting to ten years ago. Nowadays he found it took 30 or even 40 to get his passions under control. "Shouldn't we start interviewing the suspects, sir?" he asked eventually.

Dover really fancied a preprandial nap but his superiors at the

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Yard had been hounding him a bit recently. "Oh, all right," he grumbled. "Wheel 'em in."

"We've got the use of a room downstairs, sir."

But Dover had reached the end of his concessions. "Here, laddie, here."

Miss Wenda Birkinshaw, as befitted her status as finder of the body, was the first victim and MacGregor fought to keep his eyes fixed on her face as she undulated, in a miasma of cheap scent, over to the chair which had been placed ready for her. She even got Dover sitting bolt upright and taking notice, but this was only because her first action, after provocatively crossing her legs, was to produce her cigarettes and ask if anyone minded. MacGregor broke the world record with his lighter, and Dover was only fractionally behind with the begging bowl.

"Keep the packet," said Miss Birkinshaw grandly, and thereby insured that, whoever stood before the bar of British Justice to answer for the murder of Rupert Andrews, it wouldn't be she.

She rattled off her story with admirable economy. "I work in the typing pool at County Hall and me and Randy—that's what he told me to call him—have been friends for a couple of months. This awful weekend was his idea. Well, you didn't think I was interested in holy pictures, did you?" Miss Birkinshaw uncrossed her legs.

"Mr. Andrews booked separate rooms for you?" said MacGregor from a tight throat.

"There's elections coming up and he didn't want any filthy talk till they were over. Last night he was supposed to wait till everybody'd got settled down and then nip along to my room. Well, I got cheesed off with waiting, didn't I? Mind you, I was in two minds. The way he'd been chatting with that old Mappin woman, the silly cow! I soon put a stop to that, I can tell you. 'If you're going in for geriatrics nowadays, Randy,' I told him, 'just let me know because I can easily fix myself up elsewhere.' What, dear? Oh, last night? Well, like I said, I went looking for him, didn't I? I saw the bathroom door was half open and the light on, so I popped my head round and—ugh. It was terrible!"

"What did you do then, Miss Birkinshaw?" asked MacGregor apologetically.

"Screamed the bleeding place down, dearie, and why don't you call me Wenda?"

"Er—were you and Mr. Andrews intending to get married?"

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Miss Birkinshaw blinked her enormous baby-blue eyes. "What for?"

"Do you know anybody who'd want to murder Councillor Andrews?"

"Only just about everybody he ever met, dearie! Let's face it, he could be a right pig. He was on the outs with half the people here before I even arrived on the scene. And the other half after I got here."

Dover lit another of Miss Birkinshaw's cigarettes. "Anybody in particular?"

"Well"—Miss Birkinshaw didn't lose much sleep over the ethics of the situation—"there was that young lad, Peter Thorrowgood, for a start. Wet behind the ears? You wouldn't believe! Randy went over him like a bloomin' steamroller."

"Why?"

"Because of me, dearie! Randy thought he was trying to make time with me, though anybody could see the kid didn't know how many beans make five. Here"—Miss Birkinshaw changed the subject abruptly—"do I have to keep going to these damn old lectures? It's worse than school. I mean, *icons*—who cares?"

Dover graciously excused Miss Birkinshaw and said she could watch the telly instead. MacGregor barely managed to clear up a couple of minor points before the nubile young woman went on her way rejoicing. No, she'd never been to Skelmers Hall College before. No, she hadn't heard anything suspicious before she went out to look for Councillor Andrews, and finally she thought that Councillor Andrews had booked their places on the course about a month ago.

"What was that all about?" asked Dover after Miss Birkinshaw had departed. His mood had been much improved by the intake of nicotine.

"If the murder was premeditated, sir, the murderer would have had to apply for the course *after* Andrews did."

"Garn," said Dover, his mood not being as rosy as all that, "this murder wasn't premeditated! Stands out a mile—the joker just grabbed whatever was to hand and used it. How could he know in advance there'd be a bath brush and that sausage thing all ready and waiting?"

"He could if he'd attended a course here before, sir. That's why I asked Miss Birkinshaw if this was her first visit."

" 'Strewth," said Dover, gazing fondly at his packet of cigaret-

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tes, "you're not suspecting that poor little girl of anything, are you?"

"The doctor did say no great strength would be required, sir. And who better than Miss Birkinshaw to catch him unawares?"

Dover had no intention of wasting his time on theoretical and unpalatable discussions. "Fetch that lad in she mentioned!" he commanded and playfully punched his fist into the palm of his other hand. "Let's see if we can't bash a nice free and voluntary confession out of him!"

Peter Thorrowgood, being immature, weedy, and extremely nervous might have been tailor-made for Dover. He was so eager to cooperate that it wasn't necessary to lay a finger on him. He admitted that he was a frequent student on these weekend courses but insisted that this was his first visit to Skelmers Hall. He wasn't particularly interested in icons—nor in medieval *monasticism or pottery for beginners, if it came to that.* No, he attended these courses in order to make friends and meet people. Like young ladies of the opposite sex.

Dover sniffed.

Mr. Thorrowgood went pale and launched himself hurriedly into the rest of his *curriculum vitae.* Although currently training to be a shoe-shop manager, he didn't really consider he had as yet found his true vocation. He felt he would prefer a job which brought him more into contact with people. Like young ladies of the opposite sex. Young ladies of the opposite sex were, Mr. Thorrowgood confided, a bit thin at the moment. "Sometimes," he added, "I wonder if it's me."

Had he ever met Councillor Andrews before?

"No, never." Mr. Thorrowgood squared his shoulders. "And if you're going to ask me about that scene at the supper table, I'm quite prepared to admit that I did feel like murdering him—for a moment. He deliberately set out to humiliate me in front of everyone, you know. How was I to know that Miss Birkinshaw was some kind of special friend? In any case, all I did was indulge in some polite conversation. From the way Mr. Andrews went on, you'd have thought I'd tried to— Well, it was all very unpleasant and embarrassing. I'd be a hypocrite if I said I was sorry Mr. Andrews is dead, but that doesn't mean I killed him. Because I didn't."

And from this position young Mr. Thorrowgood refused to budge. Even Dover couldn't shake him. MacGregor took over the

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questioning as Dover sank back, sullen and exhausted, on the bed.

Mr. Thorrowgood was willing but unhelpful. He'd neither seen nor heard anything out of the ordinary last night. He'd never met any of his fellow suspects before and his application for the course had been sent in at least six months ago because you never knew if these things would get booked up and, no, he couldn't think of anybody who would have wanted to murder Mr. Andrews except—well—

Young Mr. Thorrowgood paused and licked his lips.

MacGregor exuded encouragement.

Sneaking seemed to be endemic at Skelmers Hall.

"Miss Gallop was getting pretty uptight."

"She's a fellow student?"

Mr. Thorrowgood nodded. "I thought she was going to scratch Councillor Andrews' eyes out at one point."

"Why?"

Mr. Thorrowgood didn't know. "She sort of railed against him as soon as she realized who he was. Something to do with donkeys. And goats. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. Anyhow, whatever it was, Miss Gallop claimed it was all Andrews' fault."

"When did this happen?"

"After the first lecture last night. Andrews had drawn a fair amount of attention to himself by having quite a heated argument with Professor Ross." Mr. Thorrowgood took time off to seize another straw. "That's somebody else you might have a word with—Professor Ross. He was looking pretty sick by the time Councillor Andrews had finished with him."

"Let's just stick to Miss Gallop," said MacGregor, who didn't want Dover getting all muddled up. "What was Mr. Andrews' reaction to her attack?"

"Oh, he gave back as good as he got." Mr. Thorrowgood was plainly envious. "Told her he hadn't got where he had in life by letting silly old maids like her push him around. Miss Gallop looked as though she was going to have a fit."

Dover and MacGregor were given lunch in a small room by themselves. As Mrs. Crocker explained, even before she'd seen Dover's table manners, it would be less embarrassing for all concerned.

"I don't suppose," she said as she put the soup on the table, "that they want to hobnob with you any more than you do with

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them. Not," she added as she watched Dover stuffing handfuls of bread down his gullet, "that one has much to complain about as far as this course is concerned. They're a fairly civilized lot. We've just had the one gentleman turning up for supper in an open-necked shirt, but then we've had nobody going around all day in bedroom slippers or parking their chewing gum under the chairs in the lecture room."

It was no good looking to Dover for polite conversation at feeding time, so MacGregor, raising his voice to be audible over the splashing and sloshing, did the honors. "I would imagine you get a pretty decent type here on the whole," he said politely.

"Yes, we do, really," agreed Mrs. Crocker, finding it hard to tear her eyes away from the spectacle of Dover eating. "We try to preserve the old country-house atmosphere, you know, and most people are very cooperative. Well, we're all starved for gracious living these days, aren't we? That's what makes it so depressing when somebody like Mr. Mappin lets the side down. It isn't"—she watched Dover mop up the last of his soup with the last of his bread—"as though he hadn't got a tie because he was wearing one when he arrived. Well, I'll fetch the next course, shall I? It's a beef casserole."

It would be absurd to pretend that Dover's drive, acumen, and general get-up-and-go weren't a little impaired after lunch. Two helpings of everything is hardly the formula for a dynamic afternoon.

The remaining interviews were held in the room in which the two detectives had had their lunch, and there is every reason to believe that Dover slept through the first one. This was no mean feat because Miss Betsy Gallop was a woman of strong character, loud voice, and a distinct aroma of goat.

"Never heard of Gallop Goats?" she said in disbelief. "You do surprise me. Thought everybody'd heard of Gallop Goats. S'why I got so enraged with the late unlamented. I mean, Gallop Goats are practically a national institution. Not," she added in a sour afterthought, "that they would have been much longer if Andrews had had his foul way."

MacGregor's pencil flew over the pages of his notebook as Miss Betsy Gallop let it all come gushing out.

"My small holding is on the edge of Donkey Bridge Wood," she confided. "That rotter, Andrews, bought up a chunk of land about a quarter of a mile away on which he proposed to build a housing

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tract. Planning permission? A mere formality, dear boy! He was on the Council, wasn't he? That bunch of pusillanimous sycophants would have given him the moon if he'd asked for it. You can see where that left yours truly, can't you? Right up the creek and without a paddle!"

MacGregor raised the shapeliest eyebrows in Scotland Yard, policewomen not excepted.

"Approach roads, dear boy!" explained Miss Gallop. "Scheduled to go right through the middle of my herd of pedigreed beauties! It would have put the kibosh on my whole way of life. Don't just breed goats, you know. See this trouser suit I'm sporting?"

MacGregor nodded. He'd been wondering about that trouser suit.

"Hair from my own goats!" claimed Miss Gallop proudly. "Woven by a chum of mine. That"—her brown eyes filled with tears—"was what Andrews was going to destroy, the philistine. Well, somebody's cooked his goose for him!"

The elegant MacGregor eyebrows rose again.

Miss Gallop's scowl wouldn't have looked out of place on Dover's face. "Certainly not me!"

"What happens to the housing scheme now?"

Miss Gallop turned a grubby thumb downward. "No other builder's got the pull Andrews had with the Council. I'll be able to disband my little action committee."

MacGregor turned to other aspects of the case. Was Miss Gallop interested in icons?

"No jolly fear! Just happens this is the only weekend I could get a goat-sitter. It's not everybody who can stand it, you know. When did I book? Oh, a couple of months ago. I generally give myself a little break at this time of year." She started fishing in her hip pocket. "Can give you the exact date, if you—"

MacGregor said it didn't matter.

Miss Gallop was equally forthright when it came to the events of Friday night. "Didn't hear a thing, dear boy! Dead to the world as soon as my head touches the pillow. Even the screams didn't wake me," she added. "Had to be wakened specially."

And that was that. The closing of the door must have roused Dover and there was a great deal of snorting and puffing.

MacGregor tried to put his superior in the picture as tactfully as possible. "Well, at least Miss Gallop didn't try to pin the murder on somebody else."

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"Gerrumphahugh!" said Dover. He smacked his lips. " 'Strewth, I could do with a cup of tea."

"Tea's ordered for four o'clock, sir, and we've only got Mr. and Mrs. Mappin left to see. Just enough time. We've got on quite well, all things considered."

"People don't realize what a strain it all is," said Dover through a yawn. He extracted another of Miss Birkinshaw's cigarettes and waited for MacGregor to give him a light. "Well, fetch 'em in," he growled. "The sooner we start, the sooner we finish."

"Shall we take the lady first, sir?" asked MacGregor, sensibly striking while the iron was lukewarm.

He'd reckoned without Dover's cunning. "We'll see 'em both together, laddie! It'll be quicker."

Harold and Cynthia Mappin approached their ordeal with understandable apprehension. MacGregor ran an experienced eye over them as he invited them to sit down. Mrs. Mappin was well into her middle forties in spite of fighting every day of the way. From the way she was dressed MacGregor surmised that a hefty proportion of the family income finished up on her back. Mr. Mappin was older, grayer, and shabbier. He was in a sober, badly cut suit which he had tried to enliven by permitting a tantalizing glimpse of his hairy chest to peep through the open neck of his shirt.

Dover opened the proceedings. "You can smoke if you want to."

He was out of luck. The Mappins didn't.

Dover washed his hands of the pair of 'em.

MacGregor soon found out that it was Mrs. Mappin who did the talking, answering not only her own questions but her husband's. She had a quick and decisive mind and the preliminaries were soon dispensed with. Her husband was an assistant bank manager, this was their first visit to Skelmers Hall College, and Mrs. Mappin was the one who was passionately "into" icons. Neither of them had never heard of Councillor Andrews before.

MacGregor cautiously broached the question of the alleged flirtation between Mrs. Mappin and the deceased and was not surprised to be presented with a version which differed considerably from the one supplied by Professor Ross. Mrs. Mappin modestly pictured herself as the innocent target of a lascivious brute's unbridled lust. "I simply couldn't get rid of him," she complained. "Could I, Harold? He just wouldn't leave me alone. And his hands, Sergeant, were *everywhere*!"

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MacGregor avoided catching anyone's eye.

"You've no idea what a relief it was when that girl finally turned up," Mrs. Mappin went on, twisting her lips in a sneer. "Such a cheap-looking little thing! Still, she no doubt would provide *exactly* what Councillor Andrews was looking for."

MacGregor tried to draw Mr. Mappin into the conversation but, once again, it was Mrs. Mappin who was quicker on the draw.

"Jealous?" she echoed with an unpleasant laugh. "Harold? You must be joking, Sergeant! My precious husband wouldn't so much as bat an eyelid if he saw me being attacked on the hearthrug at his feet. Councillor Andrews wasn't the first man to make a pass at me, and I doubt if he'll be the last. I've learned to protect myself and not rely on Harold's strong right arm—if any."

An uncomfortable silence followed, during which Harold Mappin grinned vaguely at nothing in particular.

MacGregor addressed the voluptuous Cynthia again. "Did you hear anything suspicious last night?"

Mrs. Mappin shook her head in a drumroll of oversize earrings. "I was so upset I took a sleeping pill."

"Because of Councillor Andrews' unwelcome attentions?"

"That," said Mrs. Mappin with a spiteful glance at her husband, "and other things."

"How about you, Mr. Mappin?"

Harold Mappin jumped. "Oh, no, nothing! I—er—I sleep very soundly."

"Like a log," agreed his wife.

"Er—twin beds?" asked MacGregor, never very happy when having to deal with such intimate matters.

"What else?" queried Mrs. Mappin.

MacGregor let them go.

"Well, that's that, sir," he said as he resumed his seat. "We've seen all the people who were in the Hall last night."

"Moldy lot," grumbled Dover. "Could have been any one of 'em."

"I'm afraid it could, sir. Anybody could have guessed that Andrews would be creeping long to Miss Birkinshaw's room as soon as things were quiet. It'd be easy enough to lie in wait for him, strike him down with the draft excluder, drag him into the bathroom, and strangle him. No,"—MacGregor tucked his pencil away in his pocket—"we're going to have our work cut out to crack this one. It'll probably take weeks."

Work? Weeks? "I fancy that last joker," Dover said desperately.

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"Harold Mappin, sir? To avenge his wife? Oh, I hardly think so. From the looks he kept giving her, I think he'd more likely murder *her*."

Dover didn't care for being crossed. "He had the opportunity!" he snarled.

"They'd *all* had the opportunity, sir."

Dover scowled. It was rapidly becoming a point of honor to drop a noose round Harold Mappin's scrawny neck. Neck? Dover was reduced to clutching at any straw. "That's why he's not wearing a tie!"

One day, MacGregor promised himself, he really would pick up the nearest blunt instrument and— "Andrews was strangled with the cord of his own dressing gown, sir, not by a necktie."

But Dover was nothing if not a whole-hogger. "Says who? Look, What's-his-name ambushes Who's-your-father and garottes him with his tie. See? But, since he's not a complete idiot, he doesn't leave the corpse lying there with his tie round its neck. No, he removes the tie and substitutes the dead man's own dressing-gown cord. What's wrong with that?"

"Mr. Mappin simply has no motive, sir."

"He's jealous of his wife." Dover looked his sergeant up and down before forestalling his objection. "I mean, you're no flaming expert on married life, are you?" MacGregor's carefree bachelor status never ceased to irritate.

MacGregor retreated to his notebook. "Practically everybody in Skelmers Hall has a better motive than Mappin, sir. The Crockers were in danger of losing their jobs here, and Professor Ross was in much the same boat. Miss Gallop might have been turned out of her goat farm and—"

"What about Wenda Birkinshaw?" demanded Dover, who could remember names perfectly well when he wanted to. "Or that reedy young man?"

"Miss Birkinshaw could have had a hundred reasons for killing Andrews," retorted MacGregor. "As for Mr. Thorrowgood—well, he admitted he could cheerfully have murdered him, given half a chance."

Dover wasn't listening. "Fetch him back!"

"Mappin, sir?"

Dover grinned. "We'll have a confrontation!" Raising his arm he managed to get a couple of wiggles out of the fat over his biceps. "I'll soon clout the whole story out of him. And if you don't like it,

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laddie," he added contemptuously, "try looking the other bloody way!"

MacGregor knew that he should have put up more of a fight, but there was nothing like a few years of close association with Dover to knock the heroics out of Dover's assistant.

Mr. Mappin returned to the interview room alone, looking even more henpecked without his wife than he did with her.

Dover acknowledged that the burden of this particular examination rested solely on his own shoulders. He opened the proceedings with typical finesse. "Where's your bloody tie?"

Mr. Mappin clutched at his throat. "My—my tie?"

Dover grew bored with all this fencing about. "You killed What's-his-name!" he roared.

To MacGregor's eternal disgust these tactics worked.

"I knew I'd never get away with it," said Mr. Mappin bitterly. "Not with my luck." He looked up and appealed to Dover. "I'm not unintelligent. I work hard. I'm honest. I've got my fair share of imagination. So why am I always a failure? Why me? Why am I the one who's passed over for promotion, left out of the first team? Damn it"—he banged his fist down on the arm of his chair—"I've only got her word for it that the boy's my son!"

It was no good expecting sympathy from Dover. "What did you do it for?"

"I knew Andrews would recognize me sooner or later. Bound to. After all, I knew him right away."

Dover blinked. "You knew Andrews?"

"Of course. We were at school together. He was the school bully and I was the school butt—a poor bespectacled little runt, no good at games, a coward . . . For three years he made my life hell on earth."

" 'Strewth!" said Dover. "And you've been nursing a grudge ever since?"

"Not a grudge exactly," said Harold Mappin wearily. "More of a promise, I suppose. Or the inability to keep a promise."

"And that's as clear as mud!" snapped Dover.

"I'm sorry." Harold Mappin sighed and tried again. "It's just that when I was a kid I always promised myself that one day I'd be a tremendous success at *something*. I didn't know what. I just knew I'd finish up a field marshal or a multimillionaire or . . . something. It was the only thing that kept me going. Without a dream like that to hang on to, I'd have cut my throat.

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Well"—Harold Mappin shrugged helplessly—"I never made it. I'm an assistant bank manager and that's my limit. I've a wife who flaunts her unfaithfulness and a son who despises me. And I'm up to my ears in debt. I've no money, no friends, and no bloody hopes for the future. Andrews would have had a field day with me. He'd have put the clock back thirty years! Well, I couldn't face it. I kept out of his way as much as I could last night, but I couldn't hope to dodge him for the rest of the weekend."

Dover relaxed with a triumphant smirk at MacGregor. "So you strangled him with your tie."

Mr. Mappin seemed mildly irritated. "No, I used the cord of his dressing gown. Why should I use my tie? I may be unlucky but I'm not stupid."

Dover frowned. Damn it, even murderers started giving you cheek these days. "Look, mate," he snarled, "you arrived here last night wearing a tie. Right? And before supper you took it off and you haven't worn it since. Well, why—if it isn't the bloody murder weapon?"

"But I've explained all that!" protested Mr. Mappin. "I didn't want Andrews to recognize me. Damn it all, that's why I killed him."

Dover leaned across and caught Mr. Mappin by the lapels. "So?"

"So the tie I was wearing was my old school tie, wasn't it? My wife nagged me into putting the damned thing on. She thinks it impresses people. Well, Andrews may not have recognized my face right away, but he would have recognized that tie because it was exactly the same as the one he was wearing!"

MacGregor saw Harold Mappin in a new light. "So you're a Butcher's Boy too!" he cried with evident delight and held out his hand. "I was at St. Spyridon's, myself."

Dover, whose formative years had been spent at the Peony Street Mixed Infants, slumped back in his chair.

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

PUBLISHER-OF-THE-MONTH: We have commented on the declining physical quality of books and their concurrent price escalation, but books are still the bargain of the ages, of course. (Where else can you make lifelong friends in a few hours for less than ten dollars?) Some books, however, are simply better bargains than others and atop the heap may be found the publications of Dover Books (180 Varick St., New York, N.Y. 10014).

Although paperbacks are not the ideal medium in which to fully enjoy a fine book, nor are they sufficiently enduring to form a literary legacy for the future, they have the indisputable and indispensable advantage of beng affordable, an attribute not always shared by clothbound books. The best of both worlds may be found in Dover editions. They are oversized paperbacks (approximately the same size as hardcovers), produced with high-quality materials (paper that will not turn yellow or turn brittle with age, signatures that are stitched, not cheaply glued, so the books will not disintegrate when opened, and sturdy covers that may outlast the cheaper hardcovers) at reasonable prices. More expensive than ordinary paperbacks but less expensive than hardcover books, they deserve a shelf in any library.

In addition to producing attractive volumes, Dover publishes some excellent titles for mystery aficionados. Among the recent releases is the first American edition of one of the legendary rarities of Twentieth Century detective fiction, C. Daly King's *The Curious Mr. Tarrant* ($3.50). Although most readers of this magazine have heard about this important short-story collection (it is on the distinguished *Queen's Quorum* list), few have read it, and the opportunity should be seized immediately. The only disappointment of Dover's new publications is that so few contain the fascinating—dare one say brilliant?—introductions by E. F. Bleiler, who has immeasurably enhanced many previous volumes for this

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publisher. One book which avoids that shortcoming is *The Passenger from Scotland Yard* by H. F. Wood ($3.50). The scholarly and perceptive introduction is easily worth the price, but the longish (nearly 300 pages) Victorian detective novel is a surprisingly pleasurable reading experience.

Also worth attention are Sax Rohmer's *The Dream Detective* ($3.00), detective stories with overtones of the supernatural; Robert van Gulik's *The Haunted Monastery and the Chinese Maze Murders* ($5.00), two full-length detective novels in a single volume, enhanced by 27 illustrations committed by the author; a reprint of T. S. Stribling's *Clues of the Caribees* ($3.50), which recounts the earliest adventures of psychologist-detective Henry Poggioli; *The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsene Lupin, Gentleman Burglar* ($3.00) by Maurice Leblanc, the first collection about the French counterpart to England's Raffles and America's Infallible Godahl; and the first American edition (believe it or not!) of Wilkie Collins' *Little Novels* ($3.00), which, although admittedly not vintage Collins, is a rare and still readable mixed collection of mysterious tales.

DO-IT-YOURSELF: Have you ever considered writing a mystery story? Two new books have been published which should make the job a lead-pipe cinch. Well, they should provide some valuable clues, anyway. *Writing Mysteries for Young People* by Joan Lowery Nixon (The Writer, Inc., $7.95) details the techniques for perpetrating saleable fiction for the burgeoning market. The long awaited revision of the *Mystery Writer's Handbook* (Writer's Digest, $8.95) is the product of the Mystery Writers of America—not all of them, quite, although it almost seems that way from the impressive list of contributors including the preface and other material by Lawrence Treat and chapters by Hillary Waugh, Rex Stout, John D. MacDonald, Stanley Ellin, Edward D. Hoch, Phyllis A. Whitney, and others unfairly neglected here. When one finishes studying this book it all seems so *easy!*

MYSTERY MELANGE: Speaking of bargains, do not overlook *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson* (Bramhall House, $9.95). This is an exact reprint, illustrations and all, of the gigantic reference tome published two years ago at $60. Ronald Burt De Waal has listed 6,221 separate books, articles, pamphlets, films, comics, records, translations, etc., etc., about the great detective and his Boswell.

Allen J. Hubin, the indefatigable editor of *The Armchair Detective,* has passed the halfway point in the compilation of a complete list of every mystery book published through the end of 1975. It should be complete (with luck and no calamities near the end of the year and will be published by Publisher's Inc

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in Del Mar, California. Current estimates are for a list of 75,000 titles.

Joan Kahn, the pre-eminent mystery editor (Harper & Row), has written another book for young readers, *Hi Jock, Run Around the Block*, illustrated by *New Yorker* cartoonist Whitney Darrow, Jr.

Whispers is a small magazine which specializes in macabre, suspense, horror, fantastic, terror, and mystery fiction. The editor, Stuart David Schiff, has compiled an anthology of the magazine's best material, titled, appropriately, *Whispers* (Doubleday, $7.95), collecting stories by Manly Wade Wellman, Robert Bloch, William F. Nolan, Richard Matheson, and other distinguished writers of chillers. For information regarding subscriptions to this illustrated magazine, contact Schiff at Whispers Press, Box 1492-W, Azalea St., Browns Mills, N.J. 08015.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Certainly among the busiest of the inhabitants of the newly built, modern Producers Center on the Universal Studios lot (the building so often doubles for medical facility exteriors, incidentally, that it carries the words "Community Hospital" stenciled along its side) is Glen A. Larsen, who among other shows guides the *Quincy* series he created, in its second season still an innovative and entertaining mystery show about the dark complex puzzles confronting a medical examiner. His newest detective, shortly to be launched, is even more intriguing: the dapper, assured, philosophic Dr. Hiro ("not Hero, Hiro"), Los Angeles Chief Coroner and forensic consultant to UCLA, a quiet genius who awes his colleagues as a walking computer who's "solved more foolproof homicides than any man in the world."

Developed as a standby lead when Quincy himself, Jack Klugman, was undergoing problems with the studio, Hiro—played by Japanese actor Yuki Shimoda—was actually used in one episode, and given a hip young black driver (Stu Gilliam) as counterpoint. The teaming clicked, and next season Hiro, now retired from the department, will be free to tackle impossible crimes all over the world. Does a wise oriental detective with a black chauffeur sound at all familiar? Yes, but actually it's bizarrely daring for TV, which has stayed away from ethnic sleuths since pressure

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groups banned the Charlie Chan films—for their Chinese *and* black stereotypes—from the New York and Los Angeles markets.

Indeed, organized protests against the depiction of crime on television have given mystery producers grave concern: Larsen (who writes many of his own shows) finds himself restricted at every turn in the business of telling a story, with review boards constantly hacking at both incidents and motivations in his plots. That's why he is retreating to the "safer" terrain of young people's mysteries (the very successful Hardy Boys series, the slightly less popular Nancy Drew, and the upcoming Tom Swift, now modernized into a youthful scientific investigator) and going out of the genre altogether to develop a science-fiction miniseries. Alas, the anti-violence crusade seems to be interfering with some of the basic rights of mystery enthusiasts.

Some of the most striking new mystery films seem to be coming out of Europe. From Italy, a troubled young priest and a woman doctor involve themselves in a complicated family-murder plot in the not-half-bad *Autopsy*. From Germany, however, director Wim Wenders has fashioned from Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley's Game* an incredibly atmospheric and suspenseful mystery drama that deserves international attention: *The American Friend*. (Miss Highsmith is no stranger to film treatment, having been worked on by both Hitchcock and Chandler.) As in *Strangers on a Train* a calculating opportunist — Dennis Hopper in the title role—lures an innocent into committing murder, and as the film accelerates to a smashing climax we scarcely notice that beneath the good surface melodrama lurk fascinating statements on fear, cowardice, identity, the bonds of friendship, and the terrfying power of evil.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Since the publication of *Murder Cavalcade* in 1946, the Mystery Writers of America anthology has been a usually annual and always welcome fixture of the crime fiction scene. Most of the major names in U.S. mystery writing, along with many of their British and European counterparts, have contributed stories to MWA anthologies, always without payment, and to be selected to edit one of the volumes (also without compensation) is considered a high honor.

Arthur Maling has edited the

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most recent volume in the series, *When Last Seen* (Harper and Row, $10.95), an excellent collection with a unifying theme of mysterious disappearances. The sixteen stories range in publication date from the Twenties—Vincent Starrett's novelet, "The Blue Door"—to 1977—one of the late Patrick O'Keeffe's last stories, written especially for this volume. Among the distinguished contributors are Ross Macdonald, Stanley Ellin, Bill Pronzini, and Lillian de la Torre. Half the stories are from *EQMM,* four more from *AHMM.*

Truthfully, the missing-persons theme has been stretched a bit on some of the stories, but no one is likely to complain about relaxed admissions standards for stories as good as Dorothy Salisbury Davis's "Born Killer" or Dan J. Marlowe's "All the Way Home."

**** Richard Bachman: *Rage,* Signet, $1.50. A mentally ill high school student holds a full classroom captive in a genuine horror novel without a hint of the occult. The book's chilling exploration of a sick mind may remind some of Jim Thompson's classic *The Killer Inside Me.* Bachman's beautifully written first novel is easily the best paperback original I've read in the past year.

*** Charles Alverson: *Not Sleeping, Just Dead,* Houghton Mifflin, $7.95. San Francisco private eye Joe Goodey, unrelentingly cynical, wise-cracking, and hit-over-the-head in the grand tradition, investigates a death at the Institute, a controversial drug treatment center in Monterey County. It's lively, entertaining, often funny, and involving throughout, though Goodey goes a bit sententious at the end.

*** Stanley Ellin: *The Luxembourg Run,* Random House, $8.95. One of the best and most versatile writers of crime fiction turns to the underworld revenge story and, as expected, gives it a fresh variation. Though not at his best here—the hero is too much of a blank for all his colorful activities, and the ending is a slight letdown—Ellin is admirable as always in style, plot-making, and evocation of a variety of settings, mostly European.

*** Donald E. Westlake: *Nobody's Perfect,* M. Evans, $7.95. Dortmunder, highly competent but incredibly unlucky crook-in-chief of several Westlake novels, turns to art theft. The resultant comic entanglements take him from New York to England and Scotland. The slapstick final scene may remind you of Abbott and Costello or the Bowery Boys. Good but not top-drawer Westlake.

*** John Ball: *Police Chief,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $6.95. Virgil Tibbs' creator introduces a new character in Jack Tallon, a Pasadena cop who becomes police chief of a small college town in Washington and must deal with a masked rapist's series of crimes. Ball combines the solid professionalism of a veteran novelist with an insider's knowledge

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of police work to produce an entertaining and informative book.
*** Larry Levine: *Snowbird,* Fawcett Gold Medal, $1.75. Fans of Matt Helm and Sam Durell will enjoy this spy fantasy of C.I.A. dirty work, deception, and doublecross.
*** Janwillem van de Wetering: *The Japanese Corpse,* Houghton Mifflin, $7.95. In his fifth book about Amsterdam's police, the author continues his unique approach to the police procedural and adds Japan as a second setting. One highlight is a very funny story about a *kamikaze* pilot.
*** John Bingham: *Ministry of Death,* Walker, $6.95. A defecting Catholic priest, disconcertingly known as Father Brown, serves as wellspring of a British domestic espionage thriller in the William Haggard vein. There are some good scenes of quiet menace.
** Marvin Kaye: *My Son, the Druggist,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $6.95. Light, pleasant whodunit with an interesting pharmacy background and a little too much overfamiliar Jewish-mother *schtick.*

Amateur detective Martin Gold is certainly more likeable than the series sleuth of Kaye's other novels, Hillary Quayle. The solution severely bends one rather basic rule of detective fiction.
** Berton Roueché: *Fago,* Harper and Row, $8.95. Brief novel of crime and greed, immediately reminiscent of James M. Cain and not to Roueché's advantage. What could have been a pretty good short story has been padded to (barely) book length.
** Richard Brautigan: *Dreaming of Babylon,* Delacorte, $7.95. The lack of such basics as plot and suspense in this homage to the Forties private-eye story would be easier to forgive if the book had some substance in other areas. But all it can offer is a few funny lines and apt turns of phrase.
** Thom Racina: *The Great Los Angeles Blizzard,* Putnam, $8.95. Great idea for a disaster novel, marred somewhat by slow development and over-cute dialogue. When the blizzard gets going, bolstered by a criminous subplot midway, the story gathers momentum and interest to the finish.

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"Q"

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EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

The titles which we are offering this month are listed on the next page. These books are regular publishers' editions, the very same as those available in bookstores. Only those books which appear can be ordered; we are not in a position to order other books so please do not include any others on the Order Form.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE NIGHTMARE CHRYSALIS, by Rosemary Gatenby. Dodd, Mead, $6.95.

Even before the half nude body of the strangled girl was found in the woods in back of his house, Ferguson Brady's life had begun to change. His fellow townspeople had written him off as an eccentric —an attractive, well-to-do young man who chose to live like a recluse. Then because of a casual impulse one Saturday in May, his life took a new direction, and he soon found himself the chief suspect in the mysterious crime. Here is a compelling story of the dark motives for murder by the author of *The Fugitive Affair* and *The Season of Danger*.

TALON, A Novel of Suspense, by James Coltrane. Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95.

Talon is the new anti-hero. A paradoxical character full of bluster and guts, with an ingenious turn of mind. His cover job is that of a clerk with the Department of Agriculture. His real job is that of a computer analyist in the CIA's satellite program. Talon monitors Nepal. When a satellite picks up a one-in-a-thousand error, he realizes that the satellite had to have been doctored in order to produce this constantly erroneous picture. What is going on in Nepal? What is the CIA itself covering up?

Talon is also a poignant story of love and loss.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Alverson, Charles	NOT SLEEPING, JUST DEAD	Houghton, Mifflin	$ 7.95	$6.35
Ball, John	POLICE CHIEF	Doubleday Crime Club	6.95	5.50
Brautigan, Richard	DREAMING OF BABYLON	Delacorte	7.95	6.35
Coltrane, James	TALON	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Dexter, Colin	THE SILENT WORLD OF NICHOLAS QUINN	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35
Ellin, Stanley	THE LUXEMBOURG RUN	Random House	8.95	6.95
Gatenby, Rosemary	THE NIGHTMARE CHRYSALIS	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Green, Edith Pinero	ROTTEN APPLES	Dutton	7.95	6.35
Kaye, Marvin	MY SON, THE DRUGGIST	Doubleday Crime Club	6.95	5.50
Maling, Arthur	WHEN LAST SEEN	Harper & Row	10.95	8.75
McClure, James	THE SUNDAY HANGMAN	Harper & Row	9.95	7.95
Racina, Thom	THE GREAT LOS ANGELES BLIZZARD	Putnam	8.95	6.95
Roueche', Berton	FAGO	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Edited by Schiff, Stuart Davis	WHISPERS	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
van de Wetering, Janwillem	THE JAPANESE CORPSE	Houghton, Mifflin	7.95	6.35
Walter, Elizabeth	DEAD WOMAN and OTHER HAUNTING EXPERIENCES	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35
Westlake, Donald E.	NOBODY'S PERFECT	M. Evans	7.95	6.35
Williams, David	SECOND SIGHT	Simon & Schuster	7.95	6.35
Wohl, James P.	THE NIRVANA CONTRACTS	Bobbs-Merrill	7.95	6.35

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

This is a second story, but not a second story by an author whose first published work appeared in EQMM. Mrs. Schwarzkopf's first story was printed in "Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine" in 1970.

The subject matter of this story is unusual—a United States coin, a 1921 Liberty Standing 25-cent piece known as a Fido because of a minting error. The author was inspired to write the story by the coin collection of her teen-aged sons, Erik and Kurt . . .

LIBERTY DOUBLE-DIE

by INEZ MINERVA SCHWARZKOPF

"Hey, that's Fido!" I said.

"Yeah, a real dog," agreed Greg Ashleigh, watching the tall stringy-haired girl leave his shop.

"Not her," I said impatiently. "The quarter."

Greg peered at the coin he was about to put into the cash register. "What do you mean?"

"A Fido," I repeated. "A coin that's a misprint. Let me see it."

Greg handed it over suspiciously. "Isn't it any good? Should I go after her?"

"Don't worry," I said slowly. "It's not counterfeit." It was beautiful, the best Fido I had ever seen. An ordinary 1921 Liberty Standing in fine condition would be worth about $40.00. This one was not ordinary. It showed clearly the marks, like ghosts on an imperfectly tuned TV, where the mint die had made a mistake—stamped the impression, then stuttered and stamped a ghost impression slightly alongside it. I had to have it.

"I'll swap you a good quarter for it," I said.

"No, thanks," Greg said. "It's kind of interesting to have around. I think I'll just keep it to show people. How'd you notice that from way over there?"

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"Collector's eye," I said shortly. I wasn't going to let Greg see my disappointment. He and I had been rivals since we were in high school 20 years ago. Our parents were friends and continually urged each of us to be more like the other. In college Greg had been an athlete and I had earned straight A's. Both of our lives had peaked in college. He wasn't good enough for the pros, and my father couldn't afford post-graduate work for me, so I had to be satisfied with teaching history in our old high school.

Greg had settled for running the family business, a combination candy store and coffee shop across the street from the school. He stayed in business by requiring that the teen-agers buy something if they wanted to hang around. You couldn't walk through the place before and after school without tripping over legs in blue jeans.

"You still collecting coins and stamps?" Greg jeeered. "Kid stuff."

"I sold my stamp collection to get through college," I said, "but I still got the coins." I wasn't going to tell him what those coins meant to me. I'd never even told Debbie Sue.

"Jerry, I don't get you," Greg said. "You haven't progressed a bit in twenty years. Man, there's a new day dawning. Consciousness III. Got to get with it, man."

Greg was always saying things like that. He prided himself on keeping up with the times and he tried to convince the younger kids that he was a real guru with his long fringe of pony tail beneath the bald spot and elephant-leg pants below his paunch.

I paid for my coffee with one of the copper-sandwich dimes they're fobbing off on us now and left to go back to my classes. My sophomore American history classes had become so harrowing that I couldn't get through the day without leaving the building for at least a few minutes at lunchtime. I had developed this habit of coming over to Greg's for a cup of coffee. Bad as his company was, it was superior to that of the kids I taught all day.

I hated what they did to history, a subject I loved. My mind's eye could see the grand panorama of our country, could feel with the colonists as they settled a new land, and the pioneers as they extended its limits. The kids saw only a procession of dates and places; they refused to let history come alive, torturing away the hour with horseplay and flirting.

The double-die quarter haunted me through the rest of the day.

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I had only recently become interested in Fidos. When my collection was new and I was young and full of pride in my country's history, I collected proof sets and uncirculated coins. Their unmarred shining surfaces mirrored my feelings. Lately I had seen the country taken over more and more by people like Greg, perverting its heritage.

I then turned my attention to older money—Indian-head pennies, large cents, state tokens, colonial coins, and eventually to mint errors like the quarter I had just seen. When I sat alone in the evening, cataloguing my collection, I could remind myself that the republic had survived fools, idiots, and misfits before and that it would survive Greg Ashleigh and the kids in my classes who refused to learn.

When I came home for supper, Debbie Sue met me at the door, complaining as always. "You promised to take me out to eat tonight," she whined. "I made a reservation at the Carousel in half an hour and you've still got to change clothes."

"Why?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Jerome, you look so out of it with that awful old tweed jacket and those patches on the elbows."

I ignored her. I was comfortable in what I was wearing. It still fit and had no obvious holes in it, so I saw no reason to throw it out for the sake of some women's magazine's idea of men's fashion.

"Why don't you get some contemporary-looking clothes?" she went on. "A top-stitched denim or a dashiki like Greg's?"

I withered her with a look, but she was too angry to notice it. Winning Debbie Sue was once a decisive victory over Greg. When we were all young, she was a cheerleader, fluffy, blonde, and peppy. Blinded by adolescence, I fell temporarily in love with her at the same time Greg did. Some atavistic female cunning told her I had a better chance of finishing college and giving her the life she thought she deserved, so she turned the full force of her young seductivity on me, leading me eagerly to the altar.

It was only after we were married that I came to know how really stupid she was. Her blonde fluffiness faded over the years along with my ardor, but she was capable (just barely) of keeping a neat and orderly house and I don't like to darn my own socks, so we stayed together.

Just once Debbie Sue had tried revolt. For a short time, while she was still somewhat pretty and before Greg went to flab, they

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had an affair. I knew about it. I also knew that she was too spineless to divorce me for him, so he was welcome to my leavings. Since that time, however, he had treated me with more sneering contempt than before. No matter. He was beneath notice.

I hurried Debbie Sue through the meal at the restaurant, refusing her request that we stay and dance. I had no intention of forcing my spine into the contortions I saw performed on the floor. When we got home, she slumped in front of the TV as usual and I retreated to my collection.

My coin collection was the most meaningful thing in my life. Patiently, over the years, I had built up a first-class collection, from Indian heads to silver dollars, worth in face value only about $450 but in actual collector's value twenty times that much. Debbie Sue had no idea of the numismatic value. To her my coins were simply another annoying evidence of my refusal to grow up and fulfill my intentions to her.

She accused me of *liking* to teach. She thought I enjoyed being with those kids. If she ever found out how much my coins were really worth, she would insist that I sell the collection and spend the money on the modernistic junk she calls contemporary furniture.

That night the double-die Liberty Standing floated through my dreams. It was criminal to allow it to remain profaned in the hands of that insensitive clod. I would have to go back tomorrow and make him an offer. I could afford to pay perhaps $25 for it, even $50, if I ignored Debbie Sue's pleas to resod the lawn this year.

Greg was particularly repulsive in a tie-dyed T-shirt and faded blue jeans when I went into the shop the next day. He had a coterie of his callow followers gathered around him and was showing them my Liberty. "Damnedest thing you ever saw, fellas," he said heartily. "The United States Government makes a mistake like this and then tries to pass it off on an unsuspecting public like there was nothing wrong with it."

"Just like Washington," squawked young Henderson who had been changing voice all year.

I waited until the first bell from across the street cleared them out and then made my offer. As soon as I saw Greg's face, I knew I had made a mistake.

"Twenty-five bucks?" he said. "Could this thing be worth that much?" He was quiet for a minute, the slow process of his think-

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ing showing all over his ugly face. "If it's worth that to you," he said finally, "I better shop around for a buyer. I might get more from somebody else."

I cursed myself for a fool and went home to brood again on the injustice of a fate which would give a beauty like my Liberty to a phoney like Greg.

Gradually I formed a plan. Greg kept the coin carelessly in his cash-register drawer, behind the currency trays. If I could watch my chance, perhaps I could get it without his knowing. With all the kids coming in and out, he would never know who had taken it.

I prepared a substitute first, another Liberty Standing of a more common date from my collection. I had a jeweler's engraving tool which I had used at one time to mark my coin boxes with my Social Security number against the possibility of theft. With the tool and a magnifying glass I engraved a faint ghost of the figure on my coin. It would never fool a collector, but it would that blowhard Greg until he tried to sell it. Then he would be publicly humiliated. He would transfer that humiliation to me for having told him the coin was valuable in the first place, but that didn't matter as long as I got the real one for my collection.

I tried to put my plan into action the following day. I waited until the store was especially busy and Greg was mopping up a glass of cola one of the kids had spilled. Casually I stood up from my stool, walked behind the counter, and announced to no one in particular, "I'll just ring up my own coffee here. You're busy," ringing ten cents on the register, putting in a dollar bill, and trying to make change while the drawer was open. I was unsuccessful.

"Watch out!" warned young Henderson. "You almost took Greg's special quarter. Here, let me help you." He deftly made change for me from the coins in the tray.

I didn't give up. I continued to ring my own sales, sometimes attempting to exchange the coins and sometimes just trying to accustom the habitués to the idea of me at the cash drawer. Every time I tried, one of those eager teen-agers noticed what I was doing and rushed to help me.

"You shouldn't let those kids be so free with your register," I told Greg. "One of these days you'll be sorry—they're going to rob you blind."

"That's the trouble with your thinking, man," Greg responded.

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"You're so filled with suspicion and mistrust that you can't recognize the beauty of youth nowadays. Man, these kids and me have a real trust relationship."

Glumly I listened to him go on in that soft-headed way, while I watched Henderson and two other kids help themselves to candy bars, slipping them smoothly into jeans pockets on the side away from Greg.

After a week I was no closer to getting the coin. Greg still spoke of taking it around to dealers, seeing how much he could get for it. In desperation I said I would match whatever he was offered.

He thought about that for a while and then said, "No, Jerry. Once I wanted something you had. Wanted it real bad, man. And you wouldn't let me have it. You didn't need it, didn't even appreciate it, but you wouldn't let me have it. No way. I'm going to sell this to somebody else."

In a crazy way I guess that made sense. But I couldn't eat or sleep for wanting that coin. It had become the most important struggle in my life-long rivalry with Greg. I realized I would have to get it when the store was closed.

Small businesses like Greg's are burglarized often in our city. The buildings are old, the locks inadequate, and the kids are always in need of money and too lazy to work for it. It was a simple matter the next time I was in the store to stop on my way back to the men's room and partially tape the back-door latch. Now when Greg closed the door for the night, it would appear to have self-locked as usual but it would be easy to work the latch open with a penknife.

That night I waited until Debbie Sue was dozing in front of a rerun of "Mod Squad," and slipped out of my study. I dressed in my old army jacket and worn-out jeans and sneakers. At the last minute I put Debbie Sue's black shag wig on my head. The transformation was complete. I looked like one of the adolescents who hung around the store. I put a pair of gloves in my pocket, to use when I got inside.

I slouched the few blocks to the store, imitating the loose-jointed swagger of the contemporary young American male, the excitement of my adventure thrilling me. All my life I had studied the history of the American vigilante, of Jesse James and the Robin Hoods of the old West, of the frontier spirit that held tightly to the eternal decencies and hanged those who violated

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them. Tonight I was not reading about American justice, I was making it live! I would liberate Liberty from the caricature of a man who held her captive and take her home with me where she belonged.

Quietly I let myself in the back door of Greg's shop. Stealthily, needing no light, walking with the pure vision of the man whose cause is just, I found my way to the cash register. It was open, the drawer emptied for the night, but as I had hoped, Greg had not emptied the little space behind the tray. In it were some rolls of pennies and my Liberty. I had just pocketed it and substituted the bogus double-die when I heard the noise. I turned toward the rustling and saw two shadowy forms on the floor. Startled, I cried out.

The figures separated and sat up. In the gloom I recognized the redhead from period 6 as she leaped to her feet and darted past me. Sobbing, she ran out the back door.

"Jerry! Man, what are you doing here in that get up?" drawled Greg, brushing himself off and approaching me.

My hand closed on a roll of pennies and I hit him as hard as I could on the temple. With a deep sense of satisfaction in a necessary job well done, I watched him slump to the floor, striking his head another blow on the edge of the counter.

The only danger, I reflected, as I made my way home, could come from that young girl. She might possibly have recognized me, as Greg had. However, I was a teacher and she was merely a child. My word would be accepted. Debbie Sue would swear that I had never left the house all night. I could make her believe it.

I hung my old clothes in the basement, walked into the living room loudly, and told a blinking, bleary-eyed Debbie Sue a plot for the TV show she had slept through, telling her we had watched it together. Only after Debbie Sue was asleep did I have a chance to place Liberty reverently in her rightful home with the other Fidos in my collection.

The next day I came home from school and went immediately to my study to gloat over my collection's new prize. My desk was in disarray, littered with empty coin folders from which the coins had been ripped. My coin drawers, plastic envelopes, cases—empty, all empty.

"Debbie Sue!" I roared, mortally wounded.

"Oh, darling, I meant to tell you," she said. "I got so worried after what happened to poor Greg. I just couldn't bear the thought

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of all that money in the house. I'm so scared they'll come after it and kill me. So I took it all down and deposited it in the bank, where it'll be safe." And she handed me an ordinary savings-account book with one entry for $457.84.

Was Debbie Sue really that dumb? Or did she do it on purpose? I don't know. I'll never know. I strangled her.

It's not bad here. In a way there's more liberty than there was in teaching. I read a lot. And they let me work one day a week in the prison canteen. I have a chance to look at all the coins that come through. I hope the bank employees didn't realize what they had. I hope she's back in circulation. I have a lifetime to look for her.

"Q"

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I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

V. C. Stabile
Vice President and Treasurer

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Michael Talbot's first story, "Oddity Imports," appeared in the April 1973 issue of EQMM, when the budding author was only eighteen years old. We called his debut in print "an odd and imaginative story." We call his second story equally "odd and imaginative"—another visit to that exciting little curiosity shop known as Oddity Imports . . .

JUST OFF ABINGDON SQUARE

by MICHAEL TALBOT

Harrington drummed his fingers nervously on the table in the restaurant of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The waiter had just brought him an envelope but refused to divulge who had sent it. Inside was a parchment card, a little larger than most business cards, with a simple message engraved on it:

ODDITY IMPORTS—*We Sell Anything*

The address was simply: *Just Off Abingdon Square.*

The card puzzled him. If it was an advertisement, it wasn't a very effective one. The message about the shop was as dubious as the address was vague. But it was engraved on expensive parchment. How strange that someone should go to such expense to say so little.

When Harrington looked up again, Moira stood before him.

"Hello, Adrian," she said coldly as she sat down and removed her gloves.

"Did you send this?" he said, waving the card.

She glanced at it blankly and shook her head. How odd, Harrington thought, and he dismissed the card as some sort of advertising gimmick. His gaze returned to Moira. Her slender frame was wrapped tightly in a khaki raincoat and clusters of copper bracelets rattled against the table as she folded her delicate white hands. Moira had the perfect Pre-Raphaelite face, he thought. Her

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hair was russet tinged with gold and hung in long ringlets under her Pucci turban. She had piercing dark eyes and her skin was starkly pale, like a wax candle. Most striking of all was her thinness, a sort of cultivated emaciation. Her fingers were skeletal, and high cheekbones pushed solidly through the pallor of her complexion. Most significant of all, he noticed the little medallion around her neck and the words *Jai Guru Deva* engraved on it.

"Do you have the money?" he asked bluntly.

She slid a tan manila envelope across the table. "Aren't you afraid you'll drain me dry?" she asked as he counted the bills.

He smiled. "You have a steady income, Moira. And I have too much information on you for you to pretend that you've run dry. Besides, I don't ask for one-tenth the money you shell out to that guru of yours. Think of me as sort of a practical investment. Your guru keeps your slate clean with God and I keep your slate clean with the law."

Moira gazed at him dispassionately. "My dear Adrian, do you know every intimacy of my life?"

"It's my business," he said, smiling.

"Aren't you afraid I'll kill you?" she returned coolly.

Harrington reached over and grabbed the medallion she wore around her neck, roughly pulling her toward him. Her eyes widened in surprise. "You won't kill me, Moira," he said in a low guttural voice. "I can tell you in one word why you won't kill me. Karma. The belief that you are held accountable for your every action. If you do something violent to me, someone will hire someone to do something violent to you. If not in this life, then in the next."

He released her and she fumbled nervously with the medallion, her fingernail gently tracing the inscription.

"I told you it was my business to know every intimacy," he continued. "I know that you believe firmly in the law of karma. Anyone who gives as much money as you do to that Eastern con-artist guru of yours would have to believe. I have you over a barrel, Moira. You *can't* harm me."

She huffed. They both knew he was right. As she stood up from the table a glimmer of her former composure returned. "Tell me, Adrian, isn't there anyone else?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I mean, I may have a steady income, but I'm not loaded. Isn't

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there anyone else you could blackmail?"

"Sure there is. I know lots of people who are hiding things. Everyone hides something. The problem is, I don't know what they are hiding." Harrington's expression became unusually contemplative for his character. "But that's neither here nor there," he said, shrugging.

Before Moira turned to leave she caught him one last time with her dark eyes. "I am powerless to do anything against you, Adrian. But no one else would let you get away with the things I let you get away with."

"Depends on how much I know about them," Harrington said behind her.

A few days later Adrian Harrington received a letter in the mail with no return address. He opened it and withdrew another parchment card. It was exactly the same as the first one:

ODDITY IMPORTS——*We Sell Anything*

Curiosity finally got the best of him and he took a taxi to Abingdon Square. To his amazement he stumbled on the shop almost immediately. From the outside the building front was nondescript. Dark awnings covered a large gray window and only a small placard revealed the name of the establishment.

When Harrington entered, the distant sound of music began to permeate the small viewing room of the shop. It was a strange melody, oddly different from anything he had ever heard before. From the back room an immense woman padded out. Her short black hair exaggerated the weight of her body; bulbous arms ended in tiny jeweled hands, and china-blue eyes peered from the doughy expanse of her face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"What is what, dear?" she said.

"What is that music?" Harrington continued.

"Oh, that." The fat woman chuckled. Her face drew into a froggy grin. "It was composed by Orpheus." She calmly flecked a speck of dust off the bare counter and began to walk away. "I'll be right back," she said.

Harrington was puzzled by the remark and shifted his weight nervously. He glanced around. Suddenly he began to think it was very odd that he had stumbled on the obscure little shop with so little difficulty. The window was frosted so that passers-by on the street were fleeting ghostly images, and a thick green velvet cur-

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tain hung on either side of the window. The floor was of fine parquet, which he found out of place for a shop off Abingdon Square. He also noticed there was no merchandise on display.

"May I help you now?" the fat lady said when she returned.

"Well," Harrington began, "you sent me this advertisement. I came mainly out of curiosity to find out how you got my name and address." He handed her the parchment business card.

"Ahh." The woman smiled. "We get mailing lists from so many of our regulars I couldn't begin to tell you how we got your name."

"But I received two of them—" Harrington continued.

"I really don't have anything to do with the mailings," she interrupted. "But as long as you're here, would you like to see some of our merchandise?"

"All right." Harrington shrugged. His curiosity increased.

The shopkeeper went into the back room for several minutes and brought out an armload of boxes. She regarded Harrington with a momentary grin as she took a hand mirror from one of the boxes and held it up in the air. In it was the reflection of the door of the shop.

"Watch," the woman directed.

Within seconds Harrington saw the shadow of a person standing outside the frosted glass door. He turned around and gazed blankly. There was no one there.

"The mirror, the mirror," the shopkeeper said.

Again he gazed at the mirror and saw the silhouetted form pacing outside the shop. Suddenly the person entered and Harrington saw that it was himself. His reflection paused and glanced around until its gaze confronted Harrington's own eyes. Alarmed, Harrington turned around again, expecting to meet some doppelganger, but there was no one there.

"This is a very special mirror," the fat lady explained as she placed it on the counter. "It reflects the past—five minutes into the past, to be exact."

"I don't believe it," Harrington said, picking up the mirror. In the reflection of the shop, however, he could see the shopkeeper coming out and greeting him for the first time. He saw his lips move as he asked her what music was playing and he saw his own puzzled expression as the shopkeeper answered and flecked the speck of dust off the counter.

"We deal in oddities," the shopkeeper offered in explanation.

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"We don't sell *anything,* you know." Again she smiled the same froggy grin. "This very special variety of looking glass is rare, of course, but it does come in variations of time."

Harrington regarded her curiously.

"This mirror," the woman continued, "reflects five minutes into the past. We also sell mirrors that reflect one day into the past, one week, or one year. Legend has it that Cleopatra owned one that would reflect twenty years into the past so that she would always look young. And"—she abruptly lowered her voice—"although we wouldn't want it to get around, we once sold a twenty-year mirror to a very famous actress." She chortled and placed the mirror back in its box. "Would you like to see more?"

Harrington simply stared wide-eyed at the woman.

"This is also a very popular curio," she continued and unwrapped an ornately carved black box. It was set with ebony and semi-precious stones and glinted in the light of the shop. Carefully the shopkeeper opened the box and presented it for Harrington's inspection. The inside of the lid was also beautifully ornate. Shiny black triangles, diamonds, and squares intersected in a complex web of inlay. The sides of the box were elaborately executed, but when Harrington peered closer he saw that the box had no bottom—only darkness.

"Set it on the counter and I'll show you," the shopkeeper murmured softly. She lit a candle and instructed Harrington to watch closely. When she held it over the box the candle flickered a little, as if some breeze had disturbed the flame. Suddenly she dropped the candle and Harrington saw it plummet down into the darkness of the box. He watched in disbelief as the flame and candle vanished into infinity.

"You can use them for ashtrays," the shopkeeper said jokingly. She clacked the box shut and promptly wrapped it up again.

"Is there more?" Harrington asked.

"We do sell a line of intangibles," she said. "You know, blizzards, visions, sneezes, dreams—that sort of thing."

"Visions?" he asked.

"We have sold many visions," she answered. "And we've been known to sell a few miracles. Of course, I couldn't reveal any of the saintly people who have purchased our product, but I will tell you that stigmata and healings used to be one of our most popular lines."

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Harrington grew excited.

"But it's not visions you are after, is it?" the shopkeeper added quickly. "I can tell you are not a religious man. Tell me, just what do you want to purchase?"

Harrington wanted to tell the woman again that he had come into the shop without the intention of buying anything when the strange music caught his ear. "Did you say that the music was composed by—"

"Orpheus," the fat lady interrupted. "Paganini got it from Mephistopheles, I think, and it fell into the hands of one of our regular customers. But that's not important. Tell me now, were you after anything in particular?"

Harrington considered. "I'm always interested in people's secrets."

The shopkeeper smiled knowingly. "Of an intimate nature, I assume?"

"You might say that."

The shopkeeper nodded briskly and pulled a small red-leather book out of one of the boxes. It had a leather strap and a tiny gold lock on it with an attached key that hung on a ribbon of velvet. Harrington noticed there was a lifelike toad embossed on the cover.

"It's a book of memoirs of sorts," the shopkeeper explained. "But not an ordinary book of memoirs." With no further explanation she opened it to a random page and slid the book toward Harrington.

In what appeared to be his own handwriting was written: *I have obtained enough information on Moira to begin blackmailing her.*

The woman's eyes glistened.

"What's the meaning of this?" Harrington demanded. "Has someone hired you—"

The shopkeeper shook her head, slipped on a pair of gloves, and riffled the pages of the book.

Harrington continued to read: *Today I met Moira at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She gave me the money, but I had to get a little intimidating with her.*

"All right," Harrington began as the woman pulled the book away. "I don't know why you're pulling this stunt—"

"Stunt, indeed," the shopkeeper said with a knowing glance. "I don't think you quite realize the remarkable nature of this book. You see, everyone who touches it will see only their darkest

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secrets—all those things in their life they wouldn't want anyone else to know. What's more, just to convince you it is no ordinary book, you'll notice all the passages are in your own handwriting."

"Go ahead," the shopkeeper said. "Thumb through the pages and tell me if anyone but yourself could have written this diary." She handed him the book and he examined it nervously. To his amazement the old shopkeeper's words were true. On page after page were things that only he could know, every coveted secret of his life, written in a handwriting indistinguishable from his own.

Harrington straightened and closed the book gently. His fingers inadvertently brushed against the embossed toad. "Does it go into the future?" he asked.

"No," the shopkeeper chuckled. She rested her chin in her tiny gloved hand and leaned closer. "This little book of memoirs can only tell people things they prefer to forget, but things they already know. One might say it acts like a good memory."

"And whoever touches the book will see his or her own life in its pages?"

"In their own handwriting."

"And they will see only those things which they don't want other people to know?"

"Every indiscretion. But," she cautioned firmly, "you must remember to wear gloves if you want to see their life. If you don't, you'll only see your own."

Harrington pondered the obvious value of such a diary to a blackmailer. Moira was small game, small indeed. There were half a dozen people he could think of who must have buried a number of skeletons in their closets to reach their current financial brackets, and now he possessed virtually all the secrets in the world at his fingertips. All he had to do was read a few choice passages . . . The prospects were dazzling.

"Are you interested?" the shopkeeper questioned, regarding him closely.

"How much?"—and Harrington reached for his wallet.

The next few days were hectic—phone calls and meetings and incredulous faces. Harrington carefully measured his demands according to the amount of horror in his clients' expressions. There were those who only seemed mildly disturbed, even embarrassed. And there were those who immediately offered large sums of money for the diary.

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Harrington accepted the money, but kept the diary. With such a miraculous little book he could apply as much pressure as he wanted, for as long as he wanted. He was set for life.

Moira hesitated a moment before she knocked at the door. When there was no answer she tried the doorknob. It opened. That was odd, she thought. Adrian was always very careful about locking his door. It didn't take long for her to see that the apartment was in a shambles. Plants had been overturned, books knocked off shelves, desk drawers emptied. In the living room she found Harrington, his gloved hands hanging lifelessly over the arms of the chair.

"So you bled someone once too often," she said matter-of-factly as she slipped on her own gloves and began looking. In a pile of papers from the desk she found the envelope with her name written carefully across the flap. It contained all the information Harrington had known about her. The book, however, was another matter. Moira finally found it in the freezer wrapped in aluminum foil. Beneath the foil was the familiar red binding and the embossed toad. She slipped the book into her shoulder bag and quickly left the apartment.

When she entered the shop just off Abingdon Square she was struck by the same unusual music. Within moments the fat shopkeeper appeared from the back room.

"So nice to see you again," she said and smiled.

Moira returned the smile. She pulled the diary out of her shoulder bag and slid it across the counter.

"Returning it, I see," the shopkeeper said, shaking her head. "No one ever keeps it for long." She paused for a moment, then gazed directly into Moira's eyes. "Tell me, dear, did you accomplish what you wanted to with it?"

"I really did very little," Moira answered. "I simply mailed two of your business cards."

"But it worked," the shopkeeper said, tilting her head back knowingly. "Didn't it?"

"Yes, it worked," Moira agreed. "But with almost no action on my part. I feel that I am blameless." She walked toward the door, then paused to make one last statement; a soft innocent smile spread across her Pre-Raphaelite face. "You might say I simply supplied enough rope," she said, opening the door. "And we all know what a person will do if you give him enough rope."

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a NEW short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Joe Huck and idea-man Stan Percival made their bow in "The Big Bunco" (November 1974 issue of EQMM) when they dreamed up a modern version of one of the oldest con games in the history of roguery—they sold tycoon E. J. Lewicki (hold your hat!) the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal. Vocationally, Joe Huck and Stan Percival are scriptwriters for a TV sit-com series; avocationally, they are a pair of "gentle grafters," this time involving, to quote Stan, "one of the finest bricks ever to receive a coat of gold paint" . . .

THE MAIN EVENT

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"They can't do this to us," I said to Stan Percival for the third time. We were in our downtown office. I was in my accustomed seat at the typewriter table and big Stan was flaked out in our garden lounge-chair, the aluminum pipes and plastic strips creaking under his 240 pounds. I was referring to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation who had just canceled the comedy series which had provided our income as freelance writers for the past year and a half.

Stan said, "It's the worst news I've heard since they told me Portia Fleming was back in town."

This was a provocative remark because the Fleming was at that moment sitting on the edge of our desk, swinging one majestic leg so that her pedicured big toe kept touching Stan's bare feet propped on my briefcase beneath her.

"Cut it out, Stan," was all Portia could say. She was treading carefully since coming back from Baytown a month ago, hoping Stan would forgive her and take her back inside his tent.

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Stan's resentment was justified. After all, Portia was the girl who ran off last year to Ontario with the Baytown construction tycoon, E. J. Lewicki, taking with her the $50,000 we had conned out of him by (hold your hat!) selling him the Jacques Cartier Bridge.

The scenario involved a flawless imitation of Montreal's mayor by an actor friend of ours, with Portia posing as the mayor's administrative assistant. The bridge, according to a confidential report she "leaked" to Lewicki, was to be demolished. We gave Lewicki a chance to buy it for scrap metal, then to sell the steel back to the city at a profit so they could use it in constructing a university complex on Ste. Helen's Island. The greedy Lewicki swallowed the bait whole, paying $50,000 as our sweetner. We were laughing.

Until Portia turned her coat like a fashion model and gave Lewicki his money back. She thought she saw a better life for herself and departed with the elderly builder to dazzle the inhabitants of my old hometown. Yes, I come from Baytown too. My name is Joe Huck.

Trouble was, Portia did not realize how deadening the boredom would be in a place like Baytown, even when there is a lot of money and a kind old man to spend it on you. So after a year she kissed Lewicki goodbye and crept back to Montreal.

"Well," Stan said to her now, "not much reason for you to keep hanging around, Portia. There goes your vehicle. Can't write you into any scripts when the show is dead."

You could see every bit of Portia's talent when you looked at her; she was a terrible actress. But she was as ambitious as the noble Brutus used to say Caesar was, and in the old days she had persuaded Stan to create a character for her in the series.

"Don't blame me," she said. "I haven't been in the show for months. It died without me."

"Then it must have been happy at the end," Stan said. His words were harsh but I noticed he could not bring himself to frown at this gorgeous girl who had been such a big part of his life for so long. Only one other woman could even approach the importance of Portia Fleming in Stan's existence, and that was his wife. He even went back to living with her after Portia left.

"Enough of this Canadian lovemaking," I said. "We are going to have to start thinking constructively. That fluttering sound you hear is our final check from the CBC entering the pipeline."

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"Here's a thought," Stan said, heaving himself onto his feet. The garden chair sighed with relief. "Let's go to lunch. You, too, Fleming. I've got a feeling I'm going to need all the friends I can get."

"Stan, that's sweet," she said. "You won't be sorry." She clasped her arms around his neck and hung down his front for a while, letting one slipper clop onto the floor. She didn't have to do that but she thought it sounded sexy. She was right.

We trooped along Ste. Catherine Street through Montreal midday traffic, just like people with a future. Turning left on Stanley, we walked up toward Maisonneuve to The Ninety-Seven Club where Stan is a member. As usual, he was going to pay. Good old Stan in his faded jeans and Southern Comfort T-shirt with nothing in his pockets but a pen to sign the tab. And there I was in my sharkskin suit and imported shoes with $115 in my wallet the last time I counted it which was twenty minutes ago when I went to the john. Well, Stan could have money too; all he has to do is be careful the way I am, I've told him and I've told him.

The only thing I don't like about The Ninety-Seven Club is all the books lying around. It used to be a second-hand bookstore before the present owner converted it into a restaurant. He retained the shelves of books so that the place smells like a library next door to a tavern. We were early, so Dallas the bartender was free to come and take our order. We drank beer and ate spinach pie and lots of crusty bread.

Stan said, "If a certain girl had not turned traitor last year, Huck and Percival would have no money worries today."

"Stanley!" Portia's cheeks puffed and colored prettily. "I thought you were going to let up on that."

"I'm only expressing my inner urge for revenge. I'd give anything to con Lewicki. Not just for the money, but for the satisfaction."

"Forget it," I said. "After what we tried, we could never get within miles of him."

Stan's eyes were slightly out of focus and it made me watery inside with fear and excitement when he said, "Don't be too sure. He's a speculator. With the right story he'd rise to the bait again."

We finished our food and had more beer. There was no place to go and nothing to do when we got there. The gainfully employed got their hats and left the club. We had more beer.

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We were just about to head over to the Maison Radio-Canada and start hanging around the program director when the door of the club opened and in came two men. Stan recognized the first one. "Myron," he called. "Come on over. Have a drink."

Myron turned out to be Myron Chester, a journalist just back from Russia where he had been the accredited correspondent for one of the Montreal papers. He was a small dapper fellow mostly in suede—suede boots, suede jacket, suede slacks. His pipe was briar because suede is inflammable. But he filled it with tobacco from a suede pouch.

Myron's companion was an ox-like individual about as big as Stan and clearly a lot harder. He was one of these chaps who sits bolt upright with one hand on each knee. The weight of his eyebrows must have been giving him a headache. His name was Asher Malkov and Myron told us his story.

Asher had managed to emigrate from Russia. He had been a cab driver in Moscow where Myron met him. As is often the case with people who try to adjust to a new country, Asher could not get along in Israel. So he jumped again, this time to Montreal where he had at least one friend, Mr. Chester.

"What are you doing now, Asher?" Stan asked.

"Moving furniture," Asher said in his throaty, passable English. When we learned to express ourselves in Russian, German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, we could criticize his pronounciation.

"Jobs are not easy," Myron explained. "But a guy with Asher's muscle can always find work."

Stan said, "I suppose I could always be Asher's partner on the other end of a piano, but I'd rather find something with less strain and more gain."

"You're *my* partner," I said, drunk enough to be reduced to defending my territory.

"Not since the program was canceled, Joe." Stan drew lines on the table with one blunt finger. "We need a new project."

"Well, if you find one," Myron said, "deal me in. I can't go back to Moscow because of female complications. They can Olga you to death over there."

"Never knew you were so desirable," Stan said.

"In Moscow I'm pure gold," the journalist said. "I'm a Canadian passport out of the country for any girl who can manage to become my wife." The look in his eyes was half lust, half fear. "And they try, old friend. They try."

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"Okay," Stan said. "My new scheme will involve you, Myron."

"And me," Asher said. "I'm tired of moving furniture."

Stan was looking thoughtful when Portia spoke up. "And don't forget me. I can be very useful, you know."

We all looked at her golden arms folded on the table top, not quite covered by the cascade of blonde hair pouring over both shoulders, and we thought of how useful she could be. Then Stan said, "All right, here we are, five enterprising people in search of a money-making scheme. We've done it before, Huck old son—inventing plots is our talent."

He was right. We had created almost 200 incredible episodes for our TV situation-comedy—plus one real-life drama involving the sale of that bridge. I had a feeling we were about to do one more.

"And I'll tell you one thing," Stan went on. "We already know who is going to get stung. E. J. Lewicki. What do we know about him?"

We pooled our knowledge of the man. I knew a certain amount, having come from the same town. Myron, the journalist, had read wire stories about him. Portia had spent almost a year as an honored guest in his home. And it was she who opened the door.

She said, "His son Harvey races powerboats on the Bay in the summer."

"Mmmmm." Proles like us did not know from powerboats.

"And he dabbles in fight promotion. He dreams of having a famous boxer come out of Baytown."

I swear you could almost hear it—the sound of Stan's brains waking up like a coop full of chickens. "There it is," he said. "We get at Lewicki through boxing."

"Excuse my ignorance, " I said, "but how in the name of Carmen Basilio do we do a thing like that?"

"Easy." Stan indicated the dramatis personnae. "Here we have the well-known Moscow correspondent and man of integrity, Myron Chester. And seated beside him is the greatest heavyweight boxer ever to defect from behind the Iron Curtain."

"Asher?" I said.

"I never boxed in my life," said the transitional Israeli.

"Sure you have," Stan said. "You were the pride of the Russian Olympic team a number of years ago until you began to express dissident views. Then you became an embarrassment, so they hid you away. Until Myron found you and helped you escape." Stan's eyes grew merry. "I've even got a name for you."

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"What is it?"

"Battleship Potemkin."

At that point I think I would have gone along just for the fun of seeing that name on a poster outside the Baytown Arena. And when I saw it there, only two months later, I had to marvel at the miracles that can be achieved when imaginative men dedicate themselves to a challenging task.

The interim had been filled with telephone calls, letters, one containing photographs of Asher posing in boxing gear, and an advance visit to Baytown by Myron and his fighter to whet appetites. Now, only days before the fight, Stan and I walked out of the Coronet Hotel and headed across the Market Square on our way to a meeting with E. J. Lewicki and his son Harvey. The purpose was to iron out the final details which meant we were going to talk money. Stan had purposely left the financial demands vague until the eleventh hour because he knew interest in town would have reached such a pitch that Lewicki would be unable to back out.

We stopped outside the arena and looked at the poster. Black letters on a yellow ground proclaimed:

HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING
10 ROUNDS
Mace Renfro—the Pride of Baytown
vs
Battleship Potemkin—the Great Red Hope

"Take a good look," Stan said. "This is one of the finest bricks ever to receive a coat of gold paint. And we have just about sold it."

We crossed the square and got into our rented car. I took the wheel because I knew the way to the Lewicki residence across the Bay. As we headed out of town I said, "Remember the scenario, Stan. Portia double-crossed us on the Jacques Cartier Bridge affair and we still hate her for it. She came back to Montreal because she was homesick but you were so miserable to her in public that she retreated to Baytown again two months ago. According to her phone call, Lewicki accepts this. Now let's not blow it."

Lewicki lived in a sprawling exhibition of architectural confusion that covered several acres of hillside, all stucco and clapboard and roofs of differing materials on varying levels. It had been

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built a piece at a time by his own construction firm whenever he had material left over from one of his residential developments. It looked like an army barracks in which each platoon had been given permission to decorate. We drove in through the main gate, parked the car, and after several wrong turns found the front door.

Harvey Lewicki let us in. "Hello, you two," he said. He was tall and beefy, the product of a lifetime of too much good food, sunshine, and fresh air. He had a petulant manner like a kid full of candy on Christmas afternoon, missing his nap, and spoiling for a spanking. Nothing really wrong with him, I supposed, that a few years of poverty wouldn't cure.

He led us into a spacious room decorated in rubbed oak and untouched books, and furnished with a Chippendale suite, a Tiffany lamp, two Jackson Pollocks, one Portia Fleming, and an E. J. Lewicki. One of the saving graces of rich people is that they tend to drink quite a lot. Soon we were settled in splendor, clutching beakers of rye whiskey, and discussing the fight.

"I must be crazy dealing with you guys again," Lewicki was saying, "after what you tried to do to me in Montreal."

"Mr. Lewicki, that's your guarantee. Would we try to do you again? After you proved yourself too smart for us last time?"

The old man twinkled. "Left you with egg on your faces."

"Yes, but the key thing is this," Stan said. "You proved to us that you're a man with imagination. Your average small-minded businessman would have walked away the minute we told him we had the Jacques Cartier Bridge for sale. But you listened, you were ready to play ball, until you saw through the scheme."

"Like I'm trying to see through this one. You boys were in a great hurry to get those posters up."

"Father," Harvey snapped, "don't go spoiling this deal. I took Mace Renfro to the yacht club last night and everybody was frantic with excitement. If he beats the Russian, it could be a fantastic short cut for him to a world rating."

"The Russian," Lewicki said. "Who's ever heard of him?"

"That's the whole point," I said, writing myself into the script. "The Russians buried Potemkin when he started talking out against the system. He was being groomed to beat the Americans and that big Cuban at the last Olympics. And he would have done it. But when he started deviating from the party line, they sent him back to the farm."

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Stan took over. "And that's why we have to stage this fight fast. When word reaches Moscow that Potemkin is here, there'll be State Department interference for sure. Unless he's granted political asylum, he could be back biting off trees in Siberia before the end of summer."

"Come on, father," Harvey nagged. "You saw the brute when he came here with Myron What's-his-name. I happen to know that was Russian they were speaking. And he's certainly built like a battleship. How can you lose?"

Lewicki's eyes were incisions, his mouth a sprung trap. He said, "All right, Portia, this is for the money. What do you say? Is it a go?"

Crafty as he was, he still believed Portia preferred him to us when anyone not in love would have known that Portia prefers Portia. "It's a go, E. J.," she said.

I held my breath while Stan said how much money we wanted. And when he said we needed it in advance, I thought the game was over. But then it happened. While the snaredrums rolled and the trumpets played the old Paramount Newsreel theme, E. J. Lewicki took out his pen and wrote a check in the amount of $25,000.

"A small safeguard, gentlemen," he said. "I've made the check out to cash and I am handing it to Miss Fleming." He did so. "She is hereby advised to retain possession of it till after the fight. Just in case your Russian turns out to be part of the Imperial family and disappears mysteriously."

"Only prudent of you, Mr. Lewicki," Stan said. "And no objection on our part." We left the room, avoiding Portia's eyes, and biting the insides of our cheeks.

The day of the fight featured a meeting between Mace Renfro and Battleship Potemkin at the afternoon weigh-in. A word about the Pride of Baytown. Every community in the Western world has its own fighting hero and the belief is that, given the opportunity, he could whip Joe Louis, Jack Dempsey, Rocky Marciano, and Muhammad Ali, one at a time or together. The local boy is real, he is flesh and blood where the others are either legends or pale images on a television screen.

Mace Renfro was Baytown's current brawler, a muscular lad who had livened up a number of boring Saturday evenings by cleaning out the Coronet Hotel beverage room, bloodying every nose within reach and smashing a few tables.

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He and our man made an interesting sight dressed only in trunks and posing side by side in the YMCA gymnasium. Renfro was copper-skinned and his narrow eyes were the color of Lake Superior on a cold cloudy day. These inherited characteristics suggested his Mohawk ancestry and he emphasized the effect by wearing his jet black hair shoulder length and controlled by a leather headband. The suggestion of menace, however, was canceled by the shy sweet smile that decorated his face whenever he was sober and in the company of strangers.

Asher Malkov, by contrast, looked like something eroded out of Sinai rock. His head was a boulder connected to the plateau of his shoulders by one inch of neck. His hair looked like the only thing hardy enough to grow on such a surface and the dark eyes peering from the cave of his brow could have been bullet holes. The announcement of the official weights—249 pounds for Potemkin and 245 for Renfro—deepened the respectful silence in the room.

The weigh-in was followed by a routing meeting between the two Lewickis, myself and Stan, the appointed referee, and other officials. We attended, having first sent Myron and Asher back to the hotel to relax. Consider our astonishment, then, when we entered the Coronet lobby an hour later to find the two of them drinking ale in the lounge accompanied by Portia Fleming.

"Hey," Stan whispered to her, "you're supposed to be with the other side."

"E.J. sent me," Portia said, "to keep an eye on the Battleship. He still thinks he may sail at sunset. Sit down. Asher is telling me about Russia."

We sat in the shadow of his massive hands as he held them in the air, grasping at words. "Russia is like a country at war, with nobody getting killed." He frowned and one of his hands settled on Portia's shoulder. He shook her gently and she vibrated in sympathy. "It is like the Great Depression, only with everybody working. Can you see that?"

"I can see that." With her glazed eyes I wondered that Portia could see anything. Stan was getting the message too. He peeled away the heavy fingers. "Don't bend my girl," he said.

Asher blinked at him. "Do I offend you?" he asked.

"To the point of violence."

Myron tried to lighten the mood. "Did you hear the one about Hitler, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan watching the May Day parade?"

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Portia interrupted him. "Never mind that," she said. "Come on, Asher. Tell me some more about the kibbutz at dawn when you march to the orange groves, singing with your friends."

Stan stared at Myron. "Is that what he's been telling her?"

Myron shrugged. "For a guy who could only drive a hack in Israel for three weeks he's sure got the lore."

Asher actually blushed. "I saw film about it at the Montreal YMHA," he said.

"I don't care," Portia said. "I like to hear you talk."

The Baytown Arena that night was packed to capacity. I came out of the dressing room to watch a couple of preliminaries. Gangling boys with white torsos and sunburned arms fluttered around each other, slapping and gasping like kids drowning in a pond. The crowd laughed and cheered, waiting for the main event. Little did they know it had been taking place for weeks.

Back in our dressing room, I heard Stan rehearsing our escape. "Now, Asher," he said, "this guy Renfro is apparently a brawler. Do you think you can stay with him for a while?"

"I'm no fighter," Asher said. "I never boxed in my life. And this man is not my enemy. I have no motive."

"How about the fact he'll be trying to kill you? Is that a motive?"

"Hold it, Stan," Myron said. Then he spoke to Asher in Russian.

"Hey, stop talking pink," Stan said.

"It's okay," Myron told us. "I just reminded him a good fight means no more furniture moving."

My ears thought they had heard the name Portia in those accented syllables but before I could comment, in came a matched set of Lewickis to offer their condolences before the approaching sacrifice.

"Where's Portia?" I asked.

"Not to worry," Lewicki said. "She's watching from my box seats. And your check is in her handbag. See that you earn it."

"I don't have a ticket," Myron said. "Would there be room in your box for me?"

"Of course." Lewicki expanded, distributing largess. "Come along."

It felt strange to be in the corner of a boxing ring, acting as a second. Stan and I crouched by Asher's stool, swabbing him with a towel, shifting the bucket, offering him drinks he didn't want from the taped bottle. Across the ring Harvey Lewicki and an

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older man, both in "Pride of Baytown" shirts, attended a sober-looking Renfro. The overhead lights felt hot on my arms. The surge and roar of the crowd were palpable. The wet heat, the noise, the pressure, the smell in the air—it was like being inside a whale in a hurricane.

Then the fighters were being announced. In this corner the Great Red Hope, Battleship Potemkin—some boos, some respectful applause; in this corner the Pride of Baytown, Mace Renfro—bedlam, thousands of thundering feet on board floors, the ropes over my retreating back, the lip of the apron at my chin, the bell!

Well, they never saw a fight like that one, in Baytown Arena or anywhere else. Mace Renfro shuffled out with a fairly professional stance, gloves held high. He waited while Battleship Potemkin stood uncertainly in his corner.

"Go, Asher!" I yelled, and the Battleship cruised forward. And then the amazing thing happened. As the Russian loomed up on his horizon, Renfro actually quailed. He hunched his shoulders and raised curved arms protectively over his head. He looked like a little boy facing an angry father.

Asher was puzzled. He stood with his gloves at his hips, peering in through Renfro's cage. The crowd was silent at first, then somebody whistled. Asher put a glove on Renfro's forearm—the touch could only be called solicitous. And Renfro shrank back; we could feel his flesh recoiling. The truth was that for weeks he had been living with the fear of having to enter the ring against the fighter groomed by the Soviet Union to destroy the deadly Cuban. Now the moment had arrived and his instinct for self-preservation had taken over.

Asher was ready to fight, to earn his pay, but he didn't know how. The crowd began to boo and whistle, to clap rhythmically and to laugh. Asher looked around and caught sight of Portia's face among the spectators. Stung with embarrassment, he turned to Renfro and called out a hoarse guttural curse. That was the final assault on Renfro's nerves. The Pride of Baytown lunged for the ropes, darted through, and made for his dressing room.

Stan was screaming in disbelief, somehow blaming Asher. "It's a farce! There goes our money. First he tries to steal my girl and then he does this!" He stormed through the ropes and flew at our man. "You!" he shouted. "You were supposed to make like a fighter, not a Bolshoi ballerina. You were supposed to raise your hands and fight. Like this. Hit! Hit!" And Stan pushed the flat of

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his hand against the Battleship's bare shoulder.

This was human contact, rude and aggressive. Asher understood it and responded. He brought his gloved hand against the side of Stan's head. It was a good buffet and Stan staggered, blinking. The crowd hummed in appreciation. Stan said, "Why, you!" and he let a solid right fly into Asher's midriff. Asher's retaliation was a glove to the other side of Stan's head.

Ah! The crowd's united cry rose to the rafters. A real Donnybrook between two big men, one in boxing gear and the other in street clothes. What originality, what a total absence of cliché! The crowd's response was a sound from ancient battlefields.

The fight lasted about ten minutes, without any bell separating rounds. Stan seemed to be winning at first, bloodying Asher's nose and closing his left eye. The bare knuckles were having their effect. But then Asher's size and better condition began to tell. He waded in with overhand punches landing like flails and at the end Stan was sitting on the canvas with one arm through the ropes.

Nobody asked for money back. They went out of that arena cheering and bubbling over, rehearsing the stories they would tell their grandchildren. By the time I got Stan on his feet and through the crowd, the dressing room was vacant and Asher's clothes were gone. "It's a good thing he left," Stan growled. "I wasn't finished with him." He washed his face and got into his jacket, looking splendidly battered. "Find Myron," he said. "Tell him Battleship Potemkin just forfeited his share of the purse."

A premonition of disaster was growing in me. It was soon confirmed. The door opened and in came E. J. Lewicki, grinning from sideburn to sideburn. "That was food for the soul," he said. "By George, I love life!"

"Listen," Stan said, "this was a fair deal. The Battleship sank but the crowd saw a fight. Okay?"

"Yes, okay. They enjoyed it and so did I. Being able to watch Stan Percival get his ears pinned back in a boxing ring—that was worth $25,000 to me." He wiped his streaming eyes with a handkerchief. "By the way, that Asher is a nice boy. We just had a talk. He'll never be a boxer but he'll be a heck of an orange grower."

I faced reality. "Are you saying—?"

"Yeah. He's gone back to Israel. He figures he'll make it this time with a little money behind him."

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"But our check—"

"Portia has it. She's gone with Asher, in the back seat of my limousine. Your friend Myron is up front with Harvey who's driving them all to Toronto to catch a plane for Tel Aviv. I bought them three one-way tickets."

E. J. Lewicki's generosity even extended to us on this occasion. He took us in a taxi to the railway station and put us on the midnight train for Montreal, treating us each to a magazine, a bag of mints, and a rented pillow for our heads. "I liked this con even better than the Jacques Cartier Bridge," Lewicki said. "If you think of another, let me have first option."

For months Stan has been trying to get over the loss of the money, of Portia Fleming, and of his pride. He still hasn't managed to bring it off. The other night we were at my place watching television and on came a documentary produced and narrated by one Myron Chester, the former Moscow correspondent. It was all about an escaped Russian, back in Israel for the second time, finally making a success of it with a good woman behind him. And there was Portia, looking ripe as the oranges on the trees she was tending.

"I've got to get her back, Joe," Stan said. "This way I've ended up with nothing. With her, I could forget the rest of it."

"She looks awfully happy to me," I said.

A commercial for a stomach remedy came on and when I looked away from the screen, I saw Stan's eyes getting small. He picked up a note pad I keep handy for ideas and took out his pen. "Do you suppose she'd come back," he said, "if I mailed her the pilot script for The Portia Fleming Show?"

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DEPARTMENT OF THIRD STORIES

Kathryn Gottlieb's first two stories in EQMM ("An Extremely Civilized Murder," March 1966, and "The Gun," January 1971) were published nearly five years apart—too long a hiatus for the work of a fine sensitive writer to be absent from our pages. Now her third story appears nearly seven years after her second—again too long a wait. But your Editor will be as patient (or impatient) as EQMM contributors wish or expect him to be. It is never too late to receive a fine sensitive story, never . . .

DREAM HOUSE

by KATHRYN GOTTLIEB

I'd better begin at the beginning—but when, I ask myself, was that? The day, I suppose, when I agreed to buy the one-acre section of property at the south end of Phil Ritchie's farm. It was one of those days when for want of something better to do, for want of a home to go to, I hung around the station house for an hour after my tour of duty. I am that figure of fun, a small-town cop. Watch some television series and you'll know what I mean. They have small eyes and paunches, and sometimes they spit and beat up on the innocent. It makes my blood boil.

About that no-home-to-go-to business. I was married for over 20 years until my wife died last year, and what I can't understand is why the end of 20 years of an unhappy marriage can leave you feeling lost, at a loss, high and dry in a fog or a desert, take your choice, and without a future. It should be a time for rejoicing, right? Well, the older I get, and I'm 48, the less I know about life. In fact, at my present rate of progress, I should be completely ignorant in another six months, give or take a few.

Well, as I say, on this particular day I ran into Phil Ritchie as I was heading back to my room in Mrs. Plauder's house, having sold my own house on the advice of my friends and enemies when

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Connie died. Let me give you one piece of advice: never listen to advice. They said the house was too big for me. Well, there are no apartments in this town for rent, and let me tell you that room of mine is big, but it's too small for me. Dismal, is what I was feeling. It's all very well to live in the present when you're a young kid; you can do it because there's that great big bank account of time and the unknown up ahead, but when you're my age and the present is all you've got, the absence of a desirable future invades the day you're living through and turns it black around the edges.

Phil Ritchie is the best type of man you find in a town like this, and I mean that as a compliment. He's a successful farmer; he also owns the farm-equipment agency down in Skyton, and the only gas station on this stretch of Route 180. Everything brings in money, and with it all he is a calm, friendly, honorable guy who does a lot of good in town, and when he suggested that we stop for a beer and a bite to eat I was glad to go along and sit with him.

He got onto my mood right away and told me I was a damn fool for listening to people about selling my house in a hurry. Then he brightened up and said he had just the solution for me and although it entailed a bit of profit-taking for him, that wasn't the reason he was offering the idea, which turned out to be this: he owned a one-acre piece of land, wooded, lying at the extreme south end of his farm and between him and the county lands, which as far as he knew they weren't about to build anything on. It would be an ideal place for me to build myself a house, he said, and start living like a human being again.

I asked him why I needed a house for one man.

"Get yourself a wife," he said. He is also blunt.

I felt my face turn red. "Like who?" I asked him.

"There are attractive women in town."

"Name one."

"Mary Ann Shifler."

We went up there just before twilight and looked at the piece of land. It was beautiful, a little bit hilly, with a gentle slope running up from the road in a westerly direction, and covered with oak and dogwood except for a little glade right in the middle of it. I knelt and scooped up a handful of earth and let it trickle through my fingers and it smelled of earth and spring and hope and I knew I would pay any price for that place.

"Name me a reasonable figure and I'll take it off your hands," I said.

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He named a reasonable price, and we shook hands on it.

Ernie and Mary Ann Shifler ran the little grocery store half a block up from Headquarters next to the Texaco station. It was the kind of place where they had a little bit of everything on the shelves, and if you couldn't find exactly what you wanted—well, you could find something else. It wasn't a restaurant, or even a luncheonette, but you could get yourself a bit of breakfast there, and there'd be a little crowd in the place before half the town was out of bed.

On the coldest winter morning, you'd see their light go on upstairs over the store along about five o'clock in the morning, and then the light would go on downstairs and you knew they would—she would—be pouring the water into the big coffee urn and it was a friendly feeling it gave you, especially when you'd been on the desk or riding around all night.

When Ernie was still around, they used to serve the coffee from before six in the morning till about eight thirty, along with buttered rolls, or Ernie would cut you a piece of pie. A friendly feeling, as I say, to watch the lights go on, but Ernie was not a friendly man. He was big, broad-shouldered, nice-looking, I guess, but he never smiled. The kind of man who talks too much or not at all, with a surly expression on his face to go with it.

And when he talked, the talk was unkind. Maybe he resented being locked up behind that counter and waiting on people who were not his betters, and maybe he didn't make a good living in the store, but he was unpleasant in my judgment over and above what circumstances called for.

Some people said he beat his wife, and it is true she wouldn't show her face in the store for periods of time, but did he beat her? Joe Patris swears he heard her screaming one night when he was driving by and he went and knocked on the door, and after a while Ernie opened up and Joe asked him if anything was wrong and Ernie said no. Joe said he'd like to talk to Mary Ann and Ernie said she's asleep and then he got a funny look on his face and said, all right, come on up, and they went up to the bedroom and she was sitting up pulling the bedcovers around her. She said, "What's wrong?" and Joe said, "I thought I heard you screaming," and she said, "You did. I was having a terrible nightmare." So what could Joe do but go away?

For a long while after Joe told me that, I pictured Mary Ann

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Shifler sitting up in her bed pulling those blankets around her. A beautiful woman. How could a man abuse a woman like that? And a nice person, too, just as sweet and cheerful and obliging as she was pretty. Sometimes I'd go in there to pick up cigarettes or odds and ends of groceries, and even while my wife was still alive I'd look at Mary Ann and think, God forgive me, if only I had a wife like that.

And then one night Ernie left her. Just walked out and never came back. You'd think she'd have been glad—everybody else in town who had dealings with him was glad—but it seemed to take her a while to get used to the idea. Probably couldn't believe her luck, I remember Joe saying. Well, I didn't understand it at the time, but now, as I say, I am a living witness to the fact that when a bad marriage ends, things don't necessarily get better right away.

But after a while Mary Ann perked up. She spruced up the store a lot, and she put in a line of ham and eggs along with the breakfast rolls, so I and a lot of the fellows got in the habit of dropping in there fairly regular.

I didn't need Phil Ritchie to tell me she was attractive. But until he mentioned her to me I had just never thought of her in a truly personal way, as maybe somebody who could care for me. The minute I thought of building the house on the acre up by the county farm, then everything changed, and I could see her in that house, my wife, cooking the ham and eggs for yours truly and forget the store. The funny part is, my reaction at first was to stay away from the store for a while. I didn't stop to figure it out, but I think maybe I didn't want to watch her waiting on a bunch of strange men. Not my wife.

And then one day I was walking past the store and there was nobody inside but Mary Ann, so I went in and walked up to her and said, "You and I are alone now. I don't mean there's nobody in the store. We're alone in life now. I want you to come have dinner with me." She said she'd like to do that.

I took her out to the Red Mill up near Slingerstown, not that I was trying to hide anything but I wanted to take her to a nice place where we wouldn't be surrounded by people we knew, so we could be alone together and get to know each other. After that we went up there most of the time, and sometimes out to Poole's place, which isn't as fancy as the Mill but was nice and clean and quiet and usually half deserted. I don't know how the Pooles made

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a living there, except that wasn't for me to worry about. But being a policeman, you get to thinking after a while that everything's your business; one of the hazards of the trade.

And being a policeman, I am also inclined to be blunt and come out with what's on my mind, so right off I asked her if she had divorced Ernie and she told me it was in the works.

And then, it couldn't have been two weeks later, but I couldn't have been more sure of what I wanted if I'd waited the rest of my life, I asked her to marry me, and she didn't look coy or stall me off. She looked a little startled, and she said yes.

What a moment.

I never said a word to her about the new house I was going to build her, or about the dogwood and the oaks and all I was going to hand her on a platter, because I wanted to be sure it was me she wanted, and not something I could give her above and beyond the ordinary. A feeling of modesty. I wanted to be sure.

I guess you'd like to know what she looked like, although I cannot pretend it doesn't pain me to think of her in that personal way. I am trying to be detached about things. She was a nice height for a woman, just to my shoulder, with a lovely, shapely body, and long shiny hair about the color of a collie dog, one of the reddish brown ones, only sleek and glossy, and a lovely creamy complexion that set off her features so that even if they hadn't been beautiful they would have looked beautiful, and big clear light brown eyes of that shade you only see in natural redheads.

So I asked her, and she said yes, and then the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Why are you crying?"

"I'm happy."

I put my hand over hers. "I want you always to be happy."

The days started to get longer and I got in the habit of going up to my property in the early evenings when I wasn't with her and I'd just moon around. The buds were swelling on the dogwoods and showing white in the cracks, while the oak trees were still looking like winter was never going to end.

On the first of April I hired a bulldozer from Phil and when I got up there I saw he had delivered it. It had been run in to the edge of the glade, the way I asked, and neatly—count on Phil—with no trees disturbed; some brush lost, that was all, but of course we'd have to put in a driveway out to the road anyway, so

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that didn't matter. The next day was Mary Ann's birthday, and I planned to spring the big surprise.

I picked her up at the usual time and asked her if she'd like to have dinner at the Red Mill or somewhere else, and she said wherever I'd like, and I said no, I'm asking you; so she said the Red Mill was fine, and then asked me where I was heading, since the Mill was in the opposite direction, and I told her I had something to show her. Something *for* her, and her eyes lit up and she started to smile. "I suppose you're looking for a little bracelet in a red box or something like that," I kidded her.

She shook her head. "I don't know what I'm looking for. I'm not looking for *anything*. I'm happy just the way I am."

"You're going to be happier," I said. "I've got you a house and lot."

"You what!" She turned to me all agape, her eyes shining. "What have you gone and done?"

"I bought us the prettiest piece of land for twenty miles around and you and I are going to build our house on it."

She wrapped her arms around me and landed me a kiss on my ear, don't ask me why.

"Hey!" I said. "Hey, I'm driving!"

She unwrapped her arms and faced front again, but I noticed she kept one hand on my shoulder that was nearer to her, as though she, well, didn't want to stop touching me. After a while she said, "Where is it?"

"You'll see."

"What's it like?"

"Beautiful. Oak trees. Dogwood. A hundred dogwoods getting ready to bloom. It's the one real piece of woods in five miles of town. Beautiful."

She didn't ask me again where it was. I guess she could see the way we were heading, and after a minute she dropped her hand from my shoulder and just sat there staring out the window on her side so I couldn't see her face.

After a while I pulled up to the side of the road under our trees and turned the motor off. "You've got a bulldozer in there," she said. Her voice had a funny tone to it; she was talking in the constrained kind of way that reminded me of when she was Ernie's wife.

I got out of the car, walked around, and opened her door. "What are you going to do?" she asked me.

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"Come on," I said. I was impatient. "Let's walk over to where the 'dozer is. That's where we're going to build, right in the little open place. We won't have to touch a tree if you don't want to. It'll be just like a little private castle in the woods." I stretched my arm out, first one way and then the other, to the big open spaces of Phil's farm on the one side and the county lands on the other. "We'll be the lords of it all," I said.

She got out of the car then and stood beside me. Under the shade of the trees her face looked bleached out, and her eyes—I'll never forget her eyes—they looked huge, and hard to read. I took her hand. "Your hands are trembling."

"It's all too much," she said.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?"

She took a deep breath. "I'm grateful to you."

"Come on." I started up the path the bulldozer had crushed through the underbrush and we had got nearly to the clearing when she just sank down beside me. My first thought was that she had tripped over a root, but she hadn't gone down suddenly—she had seemed to drift down. She was kneeling and her head was hanging, and I bent down beside her and put my hand on her forehead. It felt all clammy and cold. She was muttering something and I had to get my head close and ask her what she was saying.

"Just I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"It's all right."

"I've spoiled my birthday for you."

"It's all right."

"No."

"Are you sick?"

"You'd better take me home."

I was plenty worried about her, but she wouldn't let me come upstairs. She insisted she was going straight to bed and then she'd be as right as rain in the morning. She'd just been feeling queer all day, she said, but trying not to think about it, because of her birthday and all.

I said good night, but I was uneasy. It even crossed my mind that she might be expecting, and what a feeling that was! A father at my age! Well, why not? She said she'd gotten her divorce papers, so we'd just hurry up and get married and ride out the gossip. What did I care? I rejoiced, but I was worried about her just the same.

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And the worst of it was the next day it was impossible for me to call her, due to an outbreak of vandalism at the Regional High, the worst mess you ever saw, and the principal spitting with rage and one of the teachers hysterical, and I can't say I blame her. I can understand crime, but there's something about that mindless kind of spite these kids go in for that gets you under the skin so that you feel almost capable of murder yourself and probably no better than they are.

It was nine o'clock before I got back to her place, and then I saw the lights were out, so I figured I ought not to disturb her. But I was still worried. If she was in bed that early, then didn't it mean she was still not okay? Well, the morning would have to do.

In the morning the store was shut up tight and the lights were out. I banged on the door for a while, then I figured I was drawing too much attention to myself and I went away. The day was endless, and vile. An old lady had been beaten to death and robbed, up on the Slingerstown Road. The road to the Red Mill. It gave me a literal pain across my midsection to drive up that road that day, and I knew I wouldn't be driving up it ever again, except in the line of duty.

Her letter was waiting for me at the house when I came off duty.

"My heart is broken," she wrote, "and I only hope you will not be too unhappy. I have gone away. I will not be back. It was nothing you did. No one was ever so wonderful to me. But it wouldn't have worked out. I can't say any more.

"Please see that the stuff in the refrigerator goes to the poor before it spoils, milk, eggs, and there is half a ham. You could run it up to the Sisters of Charity in Slingerstown, they will know what to do with it. I hope you don't mind my asking.

"I will ever love you."

It was that last line that got me, because it was poetry, and I believed it was true. My throat got all tight and I couldn't have spoken if I had to, except that I did, I said her name, over and over and over.

I was awake until dawn, and then I took my car out and ran up to that cursed ground. I climbed onto the bulldozer and began to move back and forth in the open space, as though I was digging a cellar. I made 27 passes—I didn't realize I had been counting—and then I saw it, and I let the load down back in the pit and climbed down and looked close.

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A thigh bone was sticking out of the loam; not a horse's, not a dog's, not a part of any of the animals that run wild in the woods.

Ernie's.

I got back on the machine and scraped back all the earth into the pit that I had been piling at the edges, which seemed to take a very long time, and then I smoothed it out and spread out a load of brush and leaves over it. All the time I felt very calm and full of hate at the same time, and pity. But more hate, for him that drove her to it.

Then I moved the bulldozer back out to the road and up the half mile to the sideroad into Phil's place, and came back to my car.

I guess the dogwoods bloomed, but I never went back to see them and I guess in God's good time the oaks leafed out. What am I going to do with the place? I can't sell it because someone else will dig there and God knows what they will turn up. My guess is a skull with a bullet hole. And for myself, I never want to see the place again. I told Phil I had changed my mind about building there.

"It's a shame," he said, shaking his head. "That's a beautiful place."

But not a happy one.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MYSTERY

by ELAINE BENEDETTI

Although in recorded history,
'Tec writers tend to be Mr.-y,
When a gal of today,
Fem Lib all the way,
Pens a tale, should she call it a Ms.-tery?

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a *NEW* short story by

ANN MACKENZIE

She came from Shorehaven, a safe and friendly place, to the big city. She was happy at first, though she missed Mrs. Monday, Miss Edelweiss, and dear old Dr. Block. And the city can be as fraught with peril as a jungle . . .

MY DEAR JENNY

by ANN MACKENZIE

My dear Jenny,

To-day's paper had a section on Australia. There was a picture of a little girl with a kangaroo—a funny-looking creature, as though the Creator had made a mistake in the pattern. But I suppose He knows best. The little girl would be about as old as Tina. Give her a hug and a kiss from her loving Grandma.

Don't worry about me. I'll be all right, I'm sure. It's just that people here aren't all that friendly—not the way they were at Shorehaven—and so I can't help being a little lonely sometimes. I suppose it's being used to living in a friendly place—when you're back in the city again you seem to feel it. The flat's very nice—and so roomy just for one! It seems to stay neat and tidy by itself, so there isn't much in the way of housework to do. But I can always keep busy writing letters to you!

I bought myself a little green budgie called Bobbie, after the dear little dog I had years ago—the one who used to bark three times for his toast. My new Bobbie is such a companion to me, sitting on my shoulder while I do my bits and pieces round the flat. I'm teaching him to talk. He says, "I love you, Tina"—very nearly!

I wish you weren't all those thousands of miles away. I'd love to visit Australia and see you.

Your loving Mother

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10, Tallcourt Buildings,
Friday

Dear Jenny,

I had quite an adventure this afternoon! I came back from the shops with some bacon and some sugar and a Danish pastry for my tea—I'm still not used to having all those shops so handy—and I found a young girl waiting outside my door.

She looked rather as I hope Tina will one day—pretty as a picture and tidy with it, not like so many you see nowadays, with their faded trousers and unbuttoned shirts. She had nicely brushed hair, and her blouse was tucked into her skirt.

She opened her blue eyes wide when I stopped by the door.

"Excuse me," she said, "but you aren't Mrs. Mabel Tucker."

"No, dear," I said, "I'm not and never have been."

"Oh," she said. "Then Mrs. Tucker's left already." And all of a sudden her face crumpled like a baby's and she burst into tears. Then she took a clean white hanky out of her handbag and blew her nose. Laugh at your fussy old mother if you like, but I think it was the hanky more than anything else that made me say, "You'd better come along in."

I sat her down on my upholstered rocking chair and she looked round her.

"This is nice," she said. (And indeed it is; I must thank your kind Herbert once again for having the agent fit it out for me. One day, perhaps, I'll thank him face to face!)

I made a pot of tea, and while she drank a cup and ate my Danish pastry she told me her pathetic little story. She and her husband had come up to town to spend a week-end; they planned to see the sights, have a good dinner somewhere, and—she said this with such a pretty blush!—choose baby-clothes for the little one she's expecting, though you'd never guess it to look at her slim figure.

"We've been looking forward to it for weeks," she said. (I don't know why she kept making me think of a grown-up Tina, silly old doting Grandma that I am—perhaps it was her pretty eyes; such a dark blue.) They came up by train, he with his week's pay and a slice of his savings tucked into a wallet in his trouser pocket.

"But the money was stolen," she said tearfully. "It must have been taken as we came out of the station." Really, Jenny, the wickedness of this world! It never ceases to surprise and grieve me.

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The only thing the poor child could think of to do was to look up an old friend of her mother's, who used to live here in this very flat, and whose address she luckily happened to remember.

"From helping Mum with the Christmas cards," she said. I thought that little remark was quite revealing.

Well, she and I went on to have a chat, and the upshot of it was that I asked them to stay the night. My spare-room will be exactly right for them—it's so pretty, thanks to Herbert being so generous.

"Are you sure?" she said, her big blue eyes brimming again.

I said, "Goodness, yes, my dear, of course I'm sure. The company will do me the world of good. I'm a lonely old woman, you see; I've only just moved up to town myself. My only daughter's in Australia, and I've never even seen my granddaughter—"

I started to tell her about Tina then, but she looked at her watch and said she ought to go and meet her husband and tell him how fantastically kind I've been.

So here I am, quite excited, writing this letter. When it's done, Bobbie and I must make up the spare-room beds. It will be such fun to use my new pink sheets!

But I wish I was making them up for you and Tina.

Your loving Mother

10, Tallcourt Buildings,
Tuesday

My dear Jenny,

You'll be surprised when I tell you that Jud and Lil are still here! They're going to stay until they've found jobs and somewhere to live—they like town life so much they want to settle here.

I said to Lil, "Are you sure you ought to take a job, what with the baby coming along quite soon?"

She used a short and rather vulgar word. She said, "You know, Gammer, you're just not with it sometimes. These days girls go on working till they pop."

Sometimes she uses a coarser turn of phrase than I'd have expected of her when we first met. I put it down to her husband's influence. From which you'll guess (correctly!) that I don't like Jud. He has what I always call modern looks—gold-rimmed glasses and plenty of wispy hair. And he has one of those sly, knowing smiles, as if he knew a secret no one else did. He wears faded

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denim trousers and checked shirts, and doesn't always smell as though he's thoroughly washed.

Your father was the same, I well remember, though of course I never liked to mention it.

They spend quite a lot of time shut up in the spare room—in fact, they don't get up till eleven or twelve. And Lil has a little transistor radio, and she plays it much more loudly than I like—though I feel I can't say anything about it. It's just a cross I'll have to bear for a while, like I had to bear your father's snoring. Well, Jud and Lil won't be here much longer, thank goodness—but I stood your father's snoring for twenty years!

Yes, company is all very well, I've decided, but in this dear little flat three is a crowd. I'm looking forward to being alone again, and having a good clean-up—his cigarette ash is all over the place, and there are cigarette burns on my coffee table. I wish you could have seen the bathroom this morning, after she'd finished—it looked like a proper wallow. My lavender powder spilt all over the floor, her towel in a wet heap just outside the door, and an oily ring round the inside of the bathtub. If there's one thing I hate, it's an oily ring round the bathtub—but I never could bear to tell your father so!

Bobbie says, "I love you Tina" so nicely now. But it takes us so long to do the housework these days! Lonely or not, I'll think twice before I have guests to stay again.

Your loving Mother

10, Tallcourt Buildings,
Sunday

My dear Jenny,

I'm a little worried. Jud and Lil are still here. It isn't so much the expense of having them, though of course one feels it. It's more that—well, you'd almost think they owned the flat. They haven't left it since the cold snap started, and they don't stick to the spare-room any more. They lounge in the living-room these days, watching television, with the heat up as high as it will go. It's stifling in there—I could hardly breathe.

Sometimes, when they're on the sofa together, he paws at her in a very embarrassing way. Of course, I have to pretend to take no notice—I'd feel so awkward if I mentioned it. I wish I was a more assertive person—your father always said I was born to be a doormat.

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No more has been said about looking for jobs.

Another thing is how much Lil has changed. I look back on the sweet young girl outside my door and wonder if she could have been a dream. She wears trousers now; they fit her shape so tightly that if she's really pregnant I'll eat my hat.

I can almost hear you saying, "Well, why not ask her?"—so I hasten to explain that I've already done so, in a very tactful, indirect kind of way. I said, "For someone who's supposed to be four months gone, dear, you're not beginning to show your condition at all."

He giggled in that high-pitched way he has. As for her, she was sitting in my rocking chair chewing gum, flicking at one of those dreadful magazines where the stories are all told in photographs with white balloons coming out of people's mouths. She didn't look up. She said, "Why don't you belt up, you nosy old woman."

You see what I mean when I say how much she's changed.

I must run along now and get their supper ready; they want fried fillets of sole with chips tonight. It's been a long time since I filleted a nice piece of fish—I only hope I haven't lost the knack. But your father always said my chips were soggy. I can hear him just as though it was yesterday. "Call these things chips?" he'd say. "I call them bloody soggy rubbish."

I find myself thinking of him so often lately.

Your loving Mother

10, Tallcourt Buildings,
Monday

My dear Jenny,

They are still here. I don't know what to do. I was happy here at first, I really was, though I missed Shorehaven and my dear friends there—Mrs. Monday, Miss Edelweiss, dear old Dr. Block—not to mention the sea being so close, and the pretty gardens. But I did enjoy coming to town, it made a change—and of course I was delighted with the flat.

But I don't think I can stand it any more. It smells of them; their mess is all over it. When they speak to me they behave as though I'm a servant—make this, they say, wash that, go and buy the other.

He wouldn't eat the fish I cooked last night. (I suppose I'm out of practice—it was undercooked.) He said it was only fit for feeding the cat. Then he burst out laughing, took a roll of notes out of

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his pocket, put it back again, and walked towards the door.

And he told me all his money had been stolen!

She half-lifted her eyes from her magazine and said, "Where are you going?"

He said, "I'm going to buy a cat to eat that fish."

She looked straight at him and said, "Oh, don't be daft."

He grinned. "It's a little Paradise up here. But the trouble with Paradise is it's so damn dull. We ought to get something going to liven it up."

She said, "What the hell d'you think you're talking about?"

He flapped his elbows and squeaked, "I love you, Tina," and walked out of the room.

I'm frightened, Jenny, I feel really frightened. I think something dreadful's going to happen soon.

Your loving Mother

My dear Jenny,

Jud has bought the cat. It's a long, thin, scrawny-looking one with a pointed face and green eyes. It sits on his lap and he strokes it and strokes it and they watch us, Bobbie and me. They watch us all the time.

I'm nearly distracted with worry about Bobbie. He doesn't talk any more. He hunches on my shoulder, against my neck, watching Jud and the cat. I can feel how fast his little heart is beating.

I daren't take my eyes off him for a second, except when I go out, and then of course I have to. I put him in his cage in my bedroom but I can't lock the door—they've taken the key and hidden it somewhere.

"Please don't let the cat get him," I beg Jud every time.

He says, "What do you think we are, Gammer? Murderers?"

I don't know what they are. They frighten me. Sometimes I hurry back when I reach the street entrance, just to be sure that Bobbie's come to no harm. Last time I must have set off five or six times before I actually got as far as the shops, and when I did, of course, I felt so breathless and exhausted I forgot most of the things I'd come to buy.

Every time I came back they'd look at each other and he'd laugh that terrible, high-pitched, whinnying laugh of his. Then she'd wink at him and settle back in my chair with her bare feet tucked up in the way she has, picking at her toenails. She hasn't washed her hair since she moved in here—when I make her bed I

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can smell it on the pillow; it's a faint, warm, oily sort of smell.

I keep begging them and begging them to go away. But he says go away, hell, they know when they are well off.

"In all the time we've been playing our little game," he said, "we've never had it so good as here with you."

I wish so much that I was back at Shorehaven, sitting in my favourite corner of the garden, with Miss Monday coming up the path to have tea with me.

I wish—how I wish— I'd never asked them to stay.

Your loving Mother

Jenny, dearest—such a terrible, tragic thing—I'm so shocked and upset, I'm still shaking all over. The cat got Bobbie—in spite of all my care—in spite of my begging Jud when I went out, "Please watch the cat, Jud—please don't let her get him."

He said, "Okay, Gammer, relax. We're not playing games any more."

That reassured me, but of course it shouldn't have—I can't forgive myself for being so foolish. But I did put Bobbie in his cage, and I closed my door. But I didn't have the key, you see, they'd taken it.

I was longer than I meant to be with my shopping—there were such long queues at the supermarket, and they'd put so many things down on the list.

When I came back, the bedroom door was open. When I went in, I found the cage was too. And oh, Jenny, it turns me faint and sick to write it—I found Bobbie's head, just his poor little speckled head all draggled with blood, lying on the mat where the cat had left it.

I saw Bobbie's eyes. They were closed and dull and blind. There's nothing so dead as the eyes of a dead bird.

I went to find Jud. He was sitting on the sofa, pawing at Lil again.

I said, "You killed my Bobbie."

He went on fiddling with her buttons. Do you know what he said? He said, "What, me, Gammer? Have you gone out of your mind? If anyone did that bird in, it was puss."

But he was lying. There was a pale green downy feather on his shirt. I knew what had happened. They'd given Bobbie to the cat, and they'd watched while she killed him.

"But what the hell," he said. "It's no great loss. That bird was

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driving me nuts with its 'I love you Tina!' "

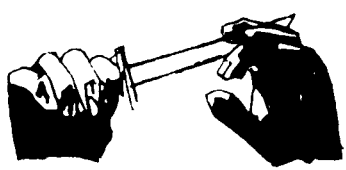
Funny. I can remember your father saying the same about the other Bobbie, my dear little dog, when the dog asked for his breakfast. Your father said, "I can't stand that bloody yap much longer." That's why he took him and had him put down that day—all because Bobbie was asking for his toast.

And that's the reason why I cut your father's throat. I used to tell Dr. Block so, and Miss Edelweiss, and all the staff and patients at Shorehaven.

"It was all on account of my little dog," I'd say, but they wouldn't admit that it was as simple as that. The hours and hours I spent in therapy, talking about my childhood and your father and my need to be dominated and my repressed aggressive urge.

And then, after those 15 happy years, they said I was better, I'd never do it again. Well, they must be wrong, mustn't they? Look at Jud and Lil. It's a knack you don't lose, like filleting fish.

But I can't stay here, with the flat in such a mess, and what's left of my darling Bobbie still on the mat. So I'll lock this letter in the bureau with the others, and take Jud's money out of his trousers pocket, and set off for Australia to look for you and Tina. The only thing is—I wish Herbert would tell me his last name and where you live. It would make it so much easier for me to find you!



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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The initials alone of a famous fictional detective can sometimes identify the character. For example, EQ can be no one else but Ellery Queen. PZ can stand only for M. P. Shiel's Prince Zaleski. CAD—who else but Poe's C. Auguste Dupin—and was Poe trying to tell us something acronymically? ASFXVD could only mean one name, Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Jacques Futrelle's The Thinking Machine. PDBW? Dorothy L. Sayers's Peter Death Bredon Wimsey.

Single initials might be a little more difficult to identify. From A to Z—A alone would mean W. Somerset Maugham's Ashenden, and Z alone Voltaire's Zadig.

And SH? Who but Sherlock Holmes—except that Edward D. Hoch has created the retired New England practitioner, Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Did Mr. Hoch consciously choose the initials of Sherlock Holmes for his own detective? Or was it an unconscious tribute to The Master? We don't know . . .

Here is one of the most baffling "impossible crimes" that Mr. Hoch has yet withdrawn from the old doctor's memory bank . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE COUNTY FAIR

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

"Say, now, I was gonna tell you about the county fair this time, wasn't I? Pull up a chair while I pour us a small—ah—libation. Close to the fire where it's warm. This here's a summer story, but it's liable to chill you to the bone . . ."

It was in the summer of '27 (Dr. Sam Hawthorne went on), and

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I was settling into my medical practice nice and steady. We hadn't had a killing in Northmont since that Election Day mystery the year before, and for the first time I was thinkin' the Grim Reaper had gone and forgotten about us. Even my nurse April remarked on it as we were leavin' for the county fair that warm August morning.

"It's almost a year since the last killing, Dr. Sam. You think law an' order has finally come to Northmont?"

"I try not to think about it at all," I told her. "Afraid I might break the spell."

She piled into the yellow Pierce-Arrow Runabout and I took the wheel. It was a short drive down Main Street and out the River Road to the fairgrounds. Usually it was a deserted place, on a slight hill not far from the river. The first thing we saw as it came into view was the grandstand surrounded by a high board fence painted a bright yellow. That and the little Ferris wheel off in the distance.

We parked the Runabout in a great dusty field at the rear of the grandstand, and I could see from the number of cars that as usual the fair was attractin' visitors from all the surrounding counties. It was a big fair, a good fair, with lots of crowd-pleasing attractions. Though April shied away from the sideshow—the snake charmer, the fat lady, the scantily clad dancing girls, and the two-headed calf—they were popular with the men and boys who always found a way to separate themselves from the womenfolk.

There were gamblers too, working their seedy con games, and they seemed to mostly prey on the young who knew no better. The older men, perhaps tired of the hootchy-kootchy girls after all these years, generally drifted down to the cattle show to inspect the animals. There they stood around while their women went to the sheds where the cakes and pies and needlework were on display. The smaller children, tired and dusty-faced, usually accompanied the women unless they could be palmed off on some willing older brother or sister.

"It's just so wonderful, Dr. Sam!" April exclaimed, her face alight with childish joy. "I wish the fair lasted the whole year long."

"But then it wouldn't be so wonderful," I argued logically. "In fact, I expect we'd all get bored with it quite soon."

"Look, there's Mayor Chadwick."

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I never saw Felix Chadwick without remembering how his predecessor had been murdered at a Fourth o' July celebration three summers earlier. But it was doubtful that the same fate would ever befall Mayor Chadwick. He was a chicken farmer who had little use for even the ceremonial aspects of politics. I was surprised he'd even shown up—until I remembered about the time capsule.

The time capsule was Emma Thane's idea. She was the closest thing we had to a town historian, and she'd come up with some obscure evidence that in 1627 merchants and adventurers from William Bradford's Plymouth Colony had set up a trading post near the present site of Northmont. "In a way it's our tercentennial," she'd announced at a meeting of the town council early that year, "and it should be celebrated properly."

Since Northmont had always been eager to fill the sky with fireworks on the Fourth o' July, there was some debate as to what form our tercentennial celebration should take. More fireworks? Bigger ones?

"No," said Emma Thane, pounding her knobby walking stick to be heard above the others. "We should bury a time capsule, to be opened a hundred years from now."

Well, the idea caught on right away, especially after Gus Antwerp from the Metal Works said he could make us a capsule out of sheet steel and even bury it for us, all at no cost to the town. It would be his contribution to the celebration, and Mayor Chadwick was quick to accept the offer.

So here was the mayor himself bearin' down on April and me, trying to put aside chickens for a day of politics and pageantry. "Don't mean to horn in on you two. Mighty fine day, ain't it? Beamin' sun, not a cloud in the sky! It would be really goin' some to top a day like this."

"A fine day, " I agreed. "And there's a goodly turnout for the fair. I see a lot of cars from outside the county."

"The bettin' attracts 'em," he confided, as if he was revealing some dark secret known only to the town council. "Are you ridin' in the afternoon races, Doc?"

It was a custom of our county fair to hold harness races on the oval track in front of the grandstand, with local citizens driving the sulkies. But it was not a sport that had ever appealed to me. "Not this year, Felix," I replied. I just never could bring myself to address him as Mayor.

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Well, I'll see you later at the time capsule. You brung somethin' to put in it?"

"Oh, sure."

He smiled at April and moved on, immediately swallowed up by the crowd headin' for the sideshow attractions. "That man!" April exploded when he was out of earshot. "I wonder if he'll go around passin' out free chickens again next election day. That's the only way he won last time."

"Oh, Felix isn't so bad. He's not up to the job, but does Northmont really need a mayor who's up to the job?"

April ran into some young women she knew and they went off to the needlework exhibit. I wandered toward the sideshows, promising to meet her at the grandstand in an hour for the time-capsule ceremonies.

I was lingering near one of the gambling tables, watching a quick-fingered three-card monte operator, when a voice behind me said, "Dr. Hawthorne, I've had the most wonderful news!"

I recognized her voice even before I turned to accept the peck on the cheek with which she always greeted me. Gert Friar was a good friend, one of the livelier and more intelligent of Northmont's eligible young women. I'd made an effort to court her myself the previous summer, but it was obvious even then that her heart belonged to a fellow named Max McNear.

"The news must be about Max," I said at once, looking into her laughing blue eyes and hiding my disappointment that she still refused to even call me by my first name.

"He's coming home! He telephoned me from Cleveland three days ago. He should be here today."

"It'll be good seein' him again," I lied, smilin' all the time. Max McNear was something of an itinerant musician and troublemaker. He'd organized a small group to play country music for local square dances, and Gert had even sung with them a few times. That was how she met Max in the first place. But after a few dances where he'd gotten drunk on bootleg hooch and beaten up some local lads, he found himself pretty much ostracized by the community. By the end of last summer, Gert Friar was the only defender he had left. His return to Northmont now would bring a few grimaces to some of the townsfolk.

"I told him about the time-capsule ceremony and he said he'd be here in time for it."

"That's fine, Gert."

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She fell into step beside me, the smile suddenly faded. "You've never really liked Max, have you, Dr. Hawthorne?"

"When you call me that I feel like your father. Please call me Sam."

"All right." The smiled returned fleetingly. "Sam."

"Good! You know, I'm really not much older than you are."

"It seems you've been here forever, though. I remember you nursing me through the measles."

"I was right out of medical school then. It was the winter of '22 when I came here."

"Only five and a half years?"

"They were important years to you, Gert. You grew into a woman."

"I'm only twenty."

"And Max is—how old?"

"Thirty-one. I know—I've heard it all from my folks plenty of times. He's too old for me. He's no good. He drinks." Her voice grew softer. "But I love him, Sam."

"I remember you were pretty broken up when he left town."

"I guess it was the suddenness of it. One day he was here, the next day he was gone. He didn't even leave me a note."

"The police were after him. Sheriff Lens was going to throw him in jail after he beat up Mayor Chadwick's boy."

"I know. The drinking was no good for him. But he told me on the telephone that he's reformed now. He hasn't had a drink in months."

"Good for him!"

"You will be friendly to him, won't you, Sam? He has so few friends here. It would mean a lot to me."

"For you I'll be friendly to him." I glanced at my pocket watch and saw that it was almost noon. "But we'd better be gettin' over to the grandstand for the ceremonies or you might lose your job." Gert worked as a secretary for Gus Antwerp, and it seemed likely he'd want her on hand for the burying of his sheet-metal time capsule.

We joined the flow of the crowd toward the yellow-walled grandstand as the barkers made one last effort to lure folks into the hootchy-kootchy tent. But even the kids were deserting temporarily the pleasures and thrills of the Ferris wheel and the other rides to witness this moment of history. The first person we saw as we entered the grandstand was old Emma Thane, leanin'

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on her knobby walking stick and breathin' fire. She spotted Gert at once and blocked our path.

"Well, young lady, your man is back, I see."

"Max! He's here?"

"Darn near ran me off the road with that truck o' his! You tell him to be more considerate to people. If he's back in Northmont to make more trouble you tell him we'd just as soon he stayed away."

"I'm sure he wasn't trying to harm you," Gert Friar murmured. I could see she was mainly interested in gettin' past this woman and flyin' into Max McNear's arms.

But Emma Thane wasn't yet ready to release us. "Folks hereabouts got to have the gumption to stand up to the likes of Max McNear. They got to tell him he has to live as part of the community. The law says we don't drink intoxicatin' beverages, and that law is the same for you and me and Max McNear."

"I'm sure he understands that, Miss Thane."

"Don't know that he does! Drove all over that road like he was drunk again. Just like the old days." But now she'd stepped aside and we were finally able to get by her. I made a parting comment on the beautiful weather and we entered the grandstand, where I got my first look at Gus Antwerp's time capsule.

He'd dug a hole for it in the very center of the oval field, around which ran the harness-racing track that would be put to use later in the afternoon. From my angle the capsule looked like a great silver cigar suspended upright from a block and tackle, its bottom already hidden by the piles of dirt around the hole. At the top of its eight-foot length, a hinged metal door stood open to receive the mementos of the community.

Mayor Chadwick, still tryin' to shake off his chicken-farmer's image, stood up and said a few appropriate words through a static-filled loudspeaker just purchased at county expense. Then Emma Thane came forward to be honored for her idea. The mayor helped her up the dirt pile so she could reach the door in the top of the erect capsule and deposit her memento—the day's newspaper. A line of school children followed. Some of the smaller ones had to be held in the mayor's arms to reach the door of the time capsule where they deposited a selection of their textbooks.

I left Gert Friar in the stands, still searching for Max's familiar face, and made my way onto the field. Gus Antwerp, looking almost clean in his neatly pressed suit, shook my hand with vigor.

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"Good to see you here, Doc! Got a smidge o' something for my capsule?"

I pulled a booklet from my inside pocket. "Medical records for last year from the grammar school. A hundred years from now they might be interested in what made our kids sick."

"Great!"

I stared up at the sheet-metal capsule. "How long did it take you to build this thing?"

"Just part o' one night is all. I rolled the sheet and welded the seam, then fixed a flat piece to the bottom and put the door in the top."

Mayor Chadwick motioned me forward, announcing my name almost inaudibly over the faulty loudspeaker. It didn't matter, though. Just about everyone knew me and a little cheer went up. I could see April at the edge of the crowd, waving to me.

I climbed up the dirt pile with my record book, taking time to peer down into the time capsule, inspectin' the thing out of sheer curiosity. The hinged door itself was round like the top of the capsule, and about two feet in diameter. With the sunlight from overhead I could see all the way to the bottom of the capsule, where the papers and books and other mementos were beginning to form a small pile. The capsule seemed too big for what little we were putting into it, but I was never one to criticize another man's labors. Besides, the thing looked great hangin' there from its ropes—almost like one of those spaceships on the cover of *Amazing Stories* magazine, pointed toward the stars.

I tapped the thin metal wall with my knuckles, wondering if it would really last a whole century, then I dropped my record book in among the other things and climbed down. A few small kitchen and farm implements went in next, together with some prize-winning recipes from the fair's baking contest. A picture of a prize bull, a Sears Roebuck Catalogue, and Mayor Chadwick's copy of the town charter completed the collection.

As we all watched, the mayor closed the top of the capsule and Gus Antwerp sealed it with his bulky welding equipment. Then, like a ship's captain guiding his vessel through a narrow strait, Gus pulled out the metal support beneath the upright capsule and signaled for it to be lowered the rest of the way into the earth. There was a screeching of metal as it disappeared from view. Then the mayor handed Emma Thane a shovel decorated with a red ribbon and helped her throw in the first symbolic bit of earth.

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I went to join April. "You were fine, Dr. Sam," she announced. "The whole thing was so moving! I wish I could be here a hundred years from now to see it dug up."

Before I could reply, Gert Friar joined us. Her deep blue eyes were wide with fright. "Dr. Haw—Sam, you've got to help me!"

"What is it?"

"I've been looking all over for Max and I finally found his truck. But he's not in it!"

"He's probably in the crowd somewhere."

"Sam, I think there are bloodstains on the front seat of the truck."

April and I exchanged glances. "I'll go look," I said quietly.

The truck was a Ford and its canvas sides were painted with the words *Max's Music Makers*. It had been a familiar sight on the back roads of Northmont during the previous summer, before Max McNear's sudden disappearance. Now it had brought him back here—to what end?

"They're bloodstains," I confirmed. "But there could be lots of explanations. He might have cut his finger. Or it could even be animal blood."

"Do you believe that?" Gert asked.

I didn't answer directly. "We'll go look for him."

"I *have* looked. I've looked everywhere."

I tried to make a joke of it. "Bet you didn't look in the hootchy-kootchy tent."

"Sam, please."

"All right, I'll help you. April you know Max McNear, don't you? We'll fan out over the fairgrounds and meet back at this truck in thirty minutes."

I took the sideshow route, checking the dancing girls' tent and the fat lady's booth. But there was no sign of the missing Max McNear. Near the end of the half hour I came upon Emma Thane and I questioned her about the truck. "You said it nearly hit you, Miss Thane. What time was that?"

"Mebbe about eleven. Or a bit earlier. Did you see him?"

"We're looking. He seems to have disappeared again."

Just like a year ago, I couldn't help thinking.

Back at the truck, I learned that April and Gert had been no more successful. "I have to find him," Gert insisted. "Those bloodstains mean he's hurt."

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Or dead, I added silently. But then another thought came to me. "Gert, are you sure it was Max you talked to on the telephone the other night? Long-distance lines can sound garbled at times, you know."

I saw her hesitate. "Well, of course it was Max. Why would he say he was if he wasn't."

"I don't know," I admitted.

"I'd be in a sorry state if I couldn't recognize Max's voice."

I watched some children running in and out of the crowd by the cake booth. Off in the distance the men were assembling for the afternoon's weight-hauling contest with teams of draft horses. Everything seemed as it should be, except for Max McNear's bloodstained truck. "Look," I said, "maybe Max didn't come back today."

"Didn't come back? Of course he came back!"

"Only Emma Thane saw him, and in truth she really saw just the truck. Gert, this is going to be very hard on you, but I have to say it. Maybe Max never came back because he never went away. He had a lot of enemies a year ago. Maybe one of them killed him."

Her sharp intake of breath was almost like a scream. "No, no, it was Max on the phone, I tell you!"

"All right," I agreed with a sigh. "Let's keep looking."

This time we agreed to meet at the grandstand for the harness races. April stayed with me and as soon as we were alone she asked, "Do you really think he's dead, Dr. Sam?"

"I don't know what to think, April. Can you remember how things were a year ago? Who were Max's enemies?"

"All I know is what the talk was at the time. He beat up Mayor Chadwick's son awfully bad, you know."

"I remember that."

"Heck, anybody he met might have disliked Max McNear. He was that sort. Even Gert Friar mighta disliked him if she caught him with some nineteen-year-old out behind somebody's barn."

"Some gal was hornin' in on Gert?"

"No one gal, but I know there were some. With Max McNear you could tell by just lookin' at him."

"Gert was already out of high school then. Was she working for Gus Antwerp?"

April shook her head. "Remember? Gus didn't move here till the fall, after Max was long gone. Gert was at loose ends and Gus

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needed a girl around the place, so he hired her."

I had one more place to look—the stables where the trotters were being prepared for the afternoon races. April came with me and we went through the stalls—but there was no Max McNear.

"Change your mind 'bout racin'?" Mayor Chadwick asked, encountering us there.

"No chance," I said. "I don't even drive buggies any more. Horseless carriages for me."

He walked with us out to the grandstand where most of the people at the fair were once again assembled. Even the gamblers and con artists had closed up their games and were busy taking bets on the races. Out in the center of the oval Gus Antwerp and a few others were finishing the burial of the time capsule. The block and tackle still hung over them—like an empty scaffold awaiting its next victim.

A cheer went up from the crowd as the first of the sulkies appeared on the oval track. But somethin' else had caught my eye—something white that fluttered in the afternoon breeze on the ground near the buried capsule. "Go find Gert," I told April. "I'll be right back."

I dashed across the dirt track and onto the grassy oval, headin' toward the men with their shovels. Gus Antwerp waved as he saw me approaching.

The thing on the ground was a book, its white pages flappin' open. It was one of the books the school children had brought to deposit in the time capsule—a seventh-grade arithmetic.

Its pages were splattered with blood.

I found Mayor Chadwick in the reviewing stand, watchin' the parade of the sulkies. "You're just in time, Doc. Got your bets down? You know Sheriff Lens is drivin' one o' them things?"

"Mayor, I want you to order the time capsule dug up."

"The—what did you say?"

"The time capsule. You have to dig it up."

"What in tarnation for? You forget to put some love letters in it? Ha, ha!"

"I'm serious, Mayor. Max McNear has disappeared."

His face hardened. "McNear disappeared a year ago."

"And now he's disappeared again."

"Well, he sure ain't in that time capsule!"

I held out the blood-splattered arithmetic book. "*This* is sup-

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posed to be in the capsule and I found it out in the field. I think the capsule was opened again after it was buried."

"Impossible!"

"I know it's impossible, but impossible things have happened in Northmont before this. I should know—I'm becoming something of an expert on them."

"You're serious, ain't you, Doc?" he asked, squinting at me.

"Damned serious."

He sighed and started for the steps. "Let's see what Sheriff Lens thinks."

The sheriff was sitting in his sulky trying to button the checkered silk shirt over his ample stomach. "I agreed to this in a weak moment," he rumbled as he saw us approaching. "I don't need none o' your jokes, Doc."

"Doc's not tellin' jokes today," Chadwick said. "He wants us to dig up the time capsule 'cause Max McNear's disappeared again."

"What are you talkin' about?"

I explained quickly, telling Sheriff Lens exactly what had happened. When I'd finished he snorted and climbed down off the sulky. "I think you got a screw loose, Doc, but to tell the truth I'd welcome any excuse not to have to drive this fool thing. Come on, let's dig."

Gus Antwerp put down his shovel as we approached and listened to our request. "We just got it buried and you want us to dig it up again?"

"That's right," I said.

"And when we get it dug up?"

"We want to open it and take a look inside."

"You're crazy! You're all crazy!"

I held out the bloodstained book. "This is crazy too, but it's a fact. There's blood in McNear's truck and blood on this book from the time capsule. I want it opened."

"But he *couldn't* be in there!" Antwerp insisted.

"I want to look all the same."

The balding man shrugged and handed me his shovel. "You got ten years on me, Doc. Go ahead and dig."

I started digging and the others joined in. When Antwerp saw we were serious he helped uncover the upper part of the capsule and got the ropes back around it. "The earth is still loose," he said. "We can probably pull it out with the block an' tackle."

A few of us got at the end of the rope but the capsule wouldn't

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budge. "Get a team of them draft horses," Sheriff Lens suggested. "They'll have it out in jigtime."

Someone went to get a team while the rest of us dug a little more. Up in the stands a low hum of conversation had grown into shouts of inquiry. They wanted to know what was going on and when the races would start. None of us answered them.

When the team was hooked up they pulled the metal cylinder free of the earth in less than a minute. We lowered it to the ground on its side and Gus Antwerp went to work with a chisel, knocking off the spot welds he'd made. Watchin' him work, I began to feel a little foolish.

Gert Friar and April had come out to watch as the time capsule was reopened. I tried to keep Gert back but she insisted on looking. And I heard her scream even before I could see inside myself.

Then April was holdin' her and I was pushin' past the white-faced Sheriff Lens to peer in at the impossible. There, among the scattered books and tools consigned to the 21st Century, was the body of Max McNear.

We tried to look at it logically.

Someone had built an underground tunnel to the capsule and gotten the body in that way.

Except that we dug all the loose earth out of the hole and found no tunnel. Found nothing but dirt.

Or maybe Gus Antwerp had the body hidden inside the capsule all the time.

Except that Gus didn't even know McNear, and I'd looked into the capsule myself and saw there was no body inside.

Or maybe the capsule had been dug up between noon and the time I found the bloodstained book.

Except that Antwerp and a couple of others were there filling in the hole. "I left for maybe ten minutes to get a hotdog," Gus said, "but there were people in the grandstand all the time, eatin' their lunches and watchin' us. That capsule never budged from the ground once it was buried."

We looked at it logically.

And logically it couldn't have happened.

"What killed him, Doc? " Sheriff Lens asked when we'd pulled the body out of the metal cylinder and I'd had a chance to examine it.

"Blow to the head with some sort of blunt instrument."

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"He been dead long?"

"Hard to say in this hot weather, but he's been dead a good many hours. All bleeding's stopped and rigor morta's is pretty far advanced. I'd say he was already dead when Emma saw his truck this morning."

"Which means?"

"Which means he wasn't drivin' it. Maybe he was dead on the front seat and the killer was driving."

Sheriff Lens just grunted at that. "But look, Doc, if the bleedin' had stopped, how'd the blood get all over the arithmetic book you found? That looked like pretty fresh blood to me."

"I don't know," I admitted.

"Do dead bodies bleed?"

"Not as a rule. But the blood drains to the lowest point and if there's a large wound at that point the blood could still be oozing out some time after death." I saw April coming and went to meet her. "How's Gert taking it?"

"Not very good, I'm afraid. You might have to give her a sleepin' powder. It's a terrible shock having him come back after a year only to get killed."

"A shock and a damned shame. Who'd hold a grudge that long?"

April led me to the needlework tent where Gert was resting on a cot. Old Emma Thane hovered over her, pressing a damp cloth to her forehead, and Gus Antwerp was holdin' her hand. "I keep tellin' her it'll be all right," he said. "But she's just not comin' around."

"It's been a shock," I said. "She'll be all right after a good rest. Why don't you all go away now?"

When Gert was alone with April and me, she opened her eyes and said, "I saw the top of his head when that door opened, Sam. His hair was all bloody."

She shuddered at her own words.

"Gert, I have to ask you some questions. It's either Sheriff Lens or me, and I thought you'd rather talk to me."

"What is it, Doc?"

"Who knew about that phone call from Cleveland? Who knew he was coming back today?"

"No one."

"Think harder, Gert. You told me when you saw me today. Maybe you told someone else too. Did your boss know?"

She shook her head. "Gus never knew Max, so there was no

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reason for me to tell him. Oh, he'd probably heard me mention Max, but he never met him."

"How about Emma Thane?"

"Why would I tell her?"

"I don't know. She just didn't seem too surprised when she saw his truck this morning."

She sat up with a little jerk. "There was one person I told. He saw me yesterday and asked if I'd be at the ceremony for burying the time capsule. I said yes, and then I mentioned that Max would be back for it too."

"Who was it you told?"

"Mayor Chadwick."

I found the mayor out by the grandstand, staring at the time capsule that still lay on its side by the dirt piles. He glanced at me with a bleak expression and said, "Damned clever way to get rid of a body, I do say that! Can you imagine their faces a hundred years from now if they opened it up an' found a skeleton?"

"About like our faces this afternoon," I suggested. The sun was low beyond the yellow fence. It was almost evening.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But who killed him, Doc?"

"It had to be someone who knew he was coming back. You knew, didn't you, Felix?"

"What's that?"

"Gert told you he was coming back today."

"She may have mentioned it. I didn't pay much attention."

"Whatever happened to that son of yours? The one Max beat up so bad."

"Joe's away at college," he answered stiffly.

"In the summer?"

He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I might as well tell you. My wife would, if you asked her. Joe's never been right in the head since that beating. He's away at a hospital. He had to drop out of college."

I stared at where the sun had been, above the yellow fence. "Enough to drive a father to murder?"

He took a plug of chewing tobacco from his pocket. "Hell, I'd of just killed him and let him lay! This business of hidin' the body in a time capsule is beyond my imagination."

I tried to remember he was only a chicken farmer posing as a mayor. Maybe a murder scheme like this was beyond him.

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"All right," I said at last. "I'll see you later, Felix."

"Findin' that body sure shot the hell out of our fair," he complained, more to himself than to me. "Had to cancel the harness racing, and a lot of the sideshow attractions people are packin' up. They don't want no truck with the police."

"It was a fine fair while it lasted," I told him.

I went off, anxious to reach the sideshow attractions before they'd all vanished. I found the barker at the girlie show and motioned him aside. "I need some information," I said.

He scowled. "Not from me, you don't."

"I'm not with the police. I'm a doctor."

"We didn't see a thing. Me an' the girls are clean."

"Sure you are. Look, sometimes sideshows do the stunt of burying someone alive—right?"

"Yeah," he said with a shrug. "I know a guy does it. Stays buried for the whole run of the fair. Folks pay a quarter to look down a tube an' see him resting in his coffin."

"How's it done?" I asked.

"Huh?"

"What's the trick?" I took a bill from my wallet and held it suggestively.

He grabbed at the bill. "Don't say I told you."

"I won't."

"The body in the coffin is a wax dummy. As soon as he's buried he crawls out through a tunnel. Indian fakirs been doin' it for centuries."

"A tunnel . . ."

"Sure, what'd you think?"

I thanked him and went away. He hadn't helped me at all. There was no tunnel to the time capsule, and even if there had been, how could the body have passed through the solid metal sides of the cylinder itself?

I went back to the grandstand, deciding to have a final look at the capsule. Mayor Chadwick was gone and dusk had settled over the field. A few kids playing on the mounds of dirt scattered as I approached.

For a long time I just stood and stared.

Supose there were *two* capsules, and we'd dug up the second one. No, the books and papers and tools had all been there. Even my school medical log was there with the body. It was the same capsule.

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But with a body inside.

I tapped my knuckles against the metal cylinder, as I'd done earlier.

Then I tapped again.

There wasn't the same ringing sound I'd heard this afternoon. Now the sound was different, more solid.

Then I remembered something else. I remembered the screeching of metal . . .

"So you know how it was done?" a voice behind me asked.

I turned and saw Emma Thane standing there in the dusk, her knobby walking stick held firmly in one hand.

For an instant I almost leaped at her, thinkin' to disarm her. But then she coughed gently and repeated her question and I relaxed. I even smiled. "I think I do, Miss Thane. I think it's just come to me."

"He should never have come back. He wasn't wanted here. The past simply caught up with him."

"Oddly enough, I think it was the future that caught up with him."

"How's that?"

I tapped her walking stick with my finger. "You should be careful of this thing, Miss Thane. Someone might mistake it for a blunt instrument."

I walked away, leaving her standing by the time capsule that was part of her dream.

April was standing with Sheriff Lens by the needlework displays when I returned. "Where's Gert?" I asked.

"Her boss is drivin' her home," April replied.

I was done takin' chances with people's lives. "Come on, we've got to stop them! There could be another murder!" Already I was running toward my car.

April came after me. "You can't mean you think Gert killed Max!"

"Of course not."

The sheriff and April piled into the two-passenger front seat with me. "But Gus never even *knew* the dead man," Sheriff Lens argued.

"That's why he killed him," I replied, sounding like one of those paradoxes in G.K. Chesterton's stories. "Didn't you notice Gus holdin' Gert's hand earlier? It's not so strange for a middle-aged

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man like Gus Antwerp to imagine himself in love with his pretty twenty-year-old secretary. He never knew Max McNear, but he'd heard plenty about him from Gert and others. He imagined Gert would be swept off her feet by the return of her lover, before he could do anything about it. It wasn't Max's past but Gus Antwerp's future that supplied the motive."

Up ahead we could see the lights of Antwerp's truck. I beeped the horn and made as if I intended to pass him. Then I cut in front of the truck, forcing it to stop. Gus tried to yank Gert from the seat but when he saw Sheriff Lens he let go and ran off toward the nearby woods. The sheriff took off after him.

"Are you all right?" I asked Gert.

She was rubbing her bruised wrist. "I—I guess so. He's gone crazy, Sam. He wanted me to run off with him tonight!"

"I was afraid he'd decide to run and take you with him. Once we found the body he knew it was only a matter of time before we figured it all out."

Sheriff Lens reappeared, alone. "Antwerp went into the river, " he said. "I don't think he made it across."

We drove back to town, with the sheriff following at the wheel of Gus Antwerp's truck. He notified the state police to watch for Gus, just in case he'd survived the river. Then, back in the sheriff's office, it was my turn to talk some more.

"It was an odd, impossible crime—but once I figured how the body got into that time capsule, Gus was the only possible killer. You see, the body wasn't put in before the capsule was sealed, or after it was opened. So it passed through those sheet metal walls somehow while the capsule was buried."

"You're makin' it sound even more impossible," the sheriff complained.

"Not really. When I tapped my knuckles on the capsule this evening it sounded different than before. More solid. And I remembered that screeching of metal as it was bein' lowered into the ground. If you examine it closely you'll see there are now *two* thicknesses of metal instead of one. Gus Antwerp put Max's body in a second cylinder, maybe an inch narrower than the one we saw. It was already in the ground, directly beneath the upright time capsule.

"After our mementos were in place, Gus pulled out the metal support—which was also the bottom of the time capsule. Everything fell through to the lower cylinder, which was open at the

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top, and where Max McNear's body was already hidden. Then Gus guided the larger top cylinder down so it fitted completely over the smaller bottom one beneath the ground. I suppose he greased the sides, but there was still that screeching of metal as they slid together. It was such a tight fit that when the capsule was dug up it looked like a single metal cylinder."

"How'd he do all that without being seen?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"It would have been easy last night, with no one around the fairgrounds. If anyone did see him unloading the second cylinder from his truck he could have said it was a spare. And once the narrower cylinder, containing the body, was beneath the ground there was no danger of its being seen. You'll remember the dirt was piled around the rim of the hole, and the top cylinder was partly in already, actually resting over the bottom one."

"But how'd Antwerp know Max was comin' back?" April asked. "Gert says she never told him."

"We can make a good guess at that. Max was due back today, but he must have come a day early in order for Gus to have killed him and planted the body last night. It's logical to believe Max tried to phone Gert again about his change in plans. She was out and her boss took the call. Instead of givin' Gert the message, Gus Antwerp's love-crazed brain devised this scheme. He told me himself he made the capsule in less than one night. It was a simple job for him to make a second, slightly narrower, cylinder that would slide inside the first one.

"Gus waited for Max's arrival last night and probably killed him with a blow to the head in the front seat of Max's truck, leaving those bloodstains. Then he took the body and the cylinders to the fairground in his own truck. This morning he drove Max's truck to the fairground, nearly hittin' Emma Thane, so it would look as if Max arrived today on schedule and then disappeared again."

Sheriff Lens grunted. "I've heard'a killers burying the bodies in some pretty clever places, but this is the first one I know who tried to bury a body in the next century!"

Dr. Sam Hawthorne took a sip of his drink as he concluded the story. "They found Antwerp's body in the river the next morning, and that was the end of it. Another small—ah—libation before you go? What's that? You're not satisfied? I didn't explain about the bloodstained arithmetic book?

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"Well, April settled that the next day. One of the boys in line at the time capsule had a sudden nosebleed all over his book. He couldn't put it in the capsule like that, so he just dropped it on the ground, behind some dirt. It had nothing to do with the killing, except that it got me to dig up the capsule and find the body. I like to leave that part out of the story, 'cause it makes me look sort of foolish. I wish you hadn't asked.

"Next time? Well, 1927 was the year of the first talking movie. Northmont was a long way from Hollywood, but when a film company came there to shoot an early talking picture it had unexpected and deadly results. But that's for next time. Come now, let me refill your glass."

"Q"

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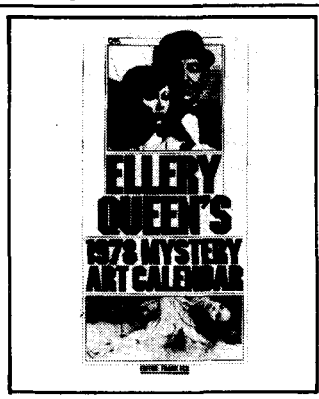

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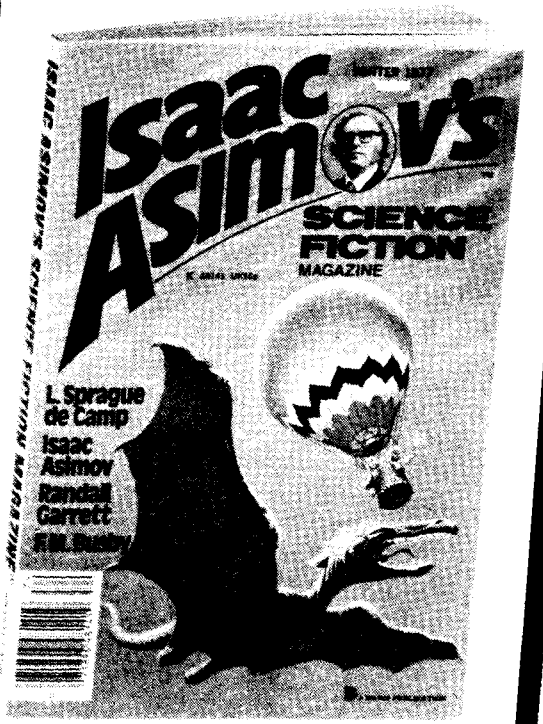

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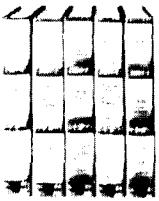

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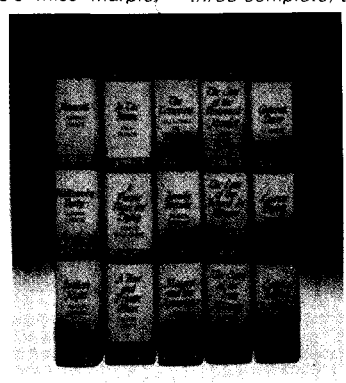

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